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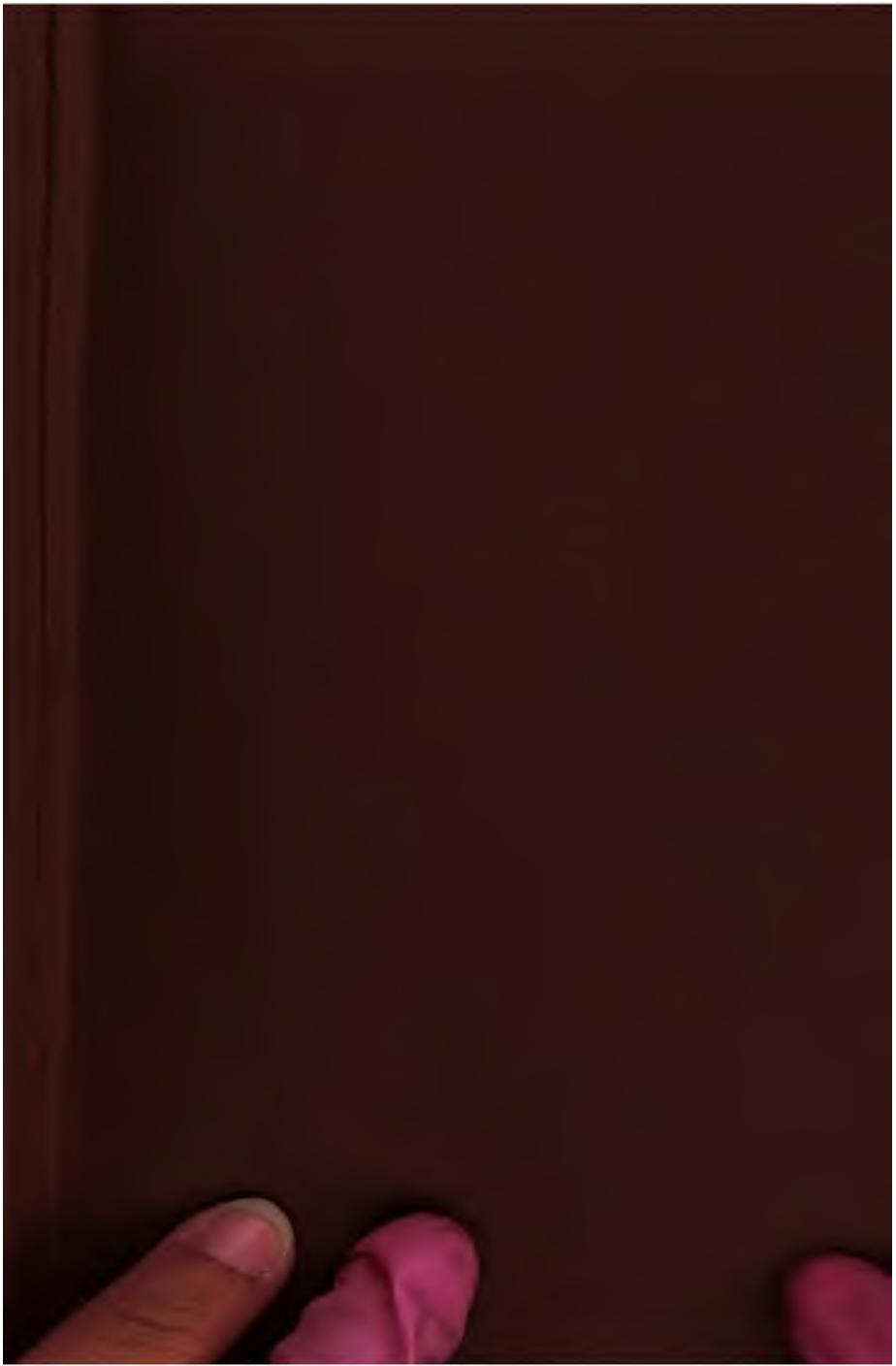
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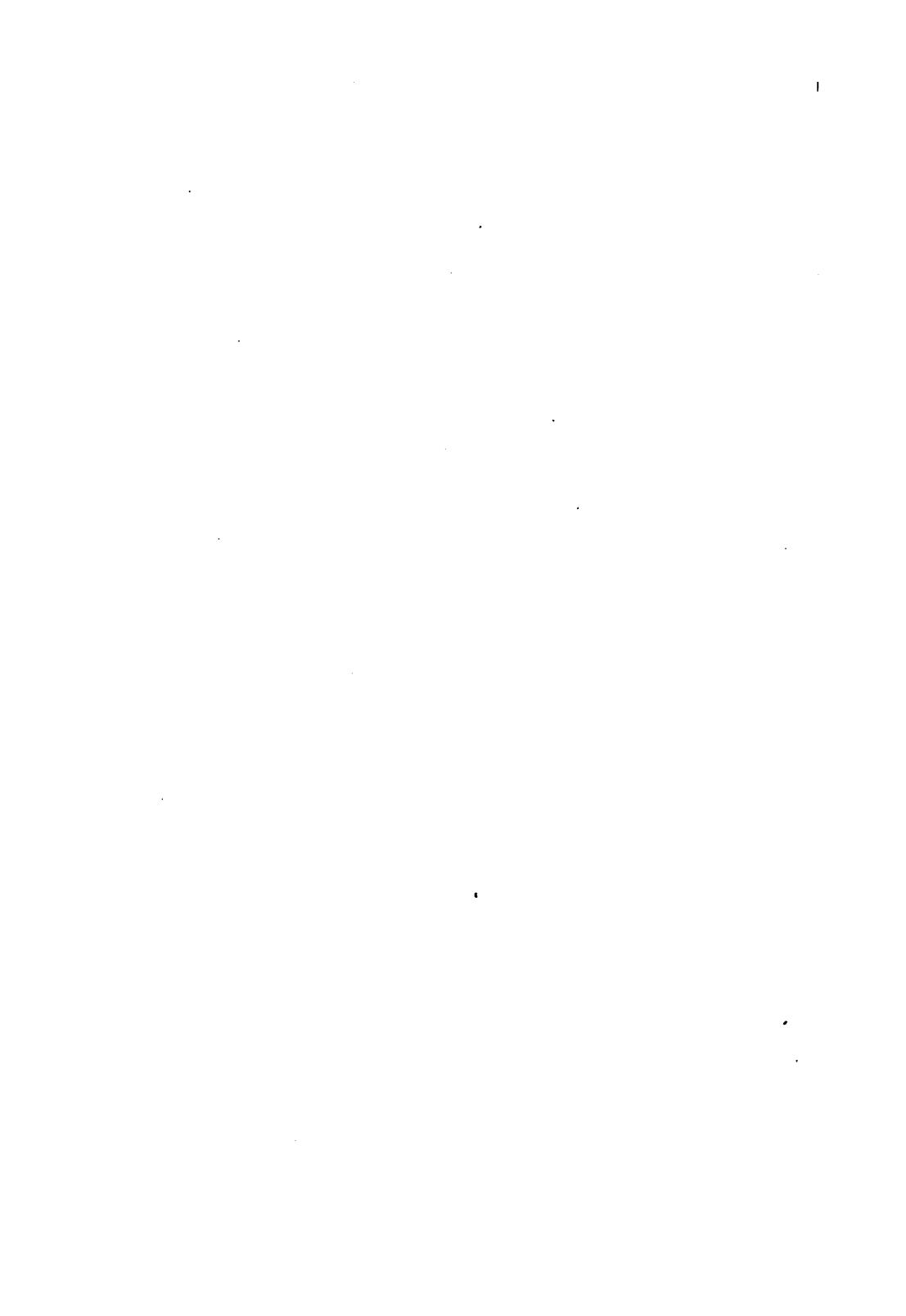




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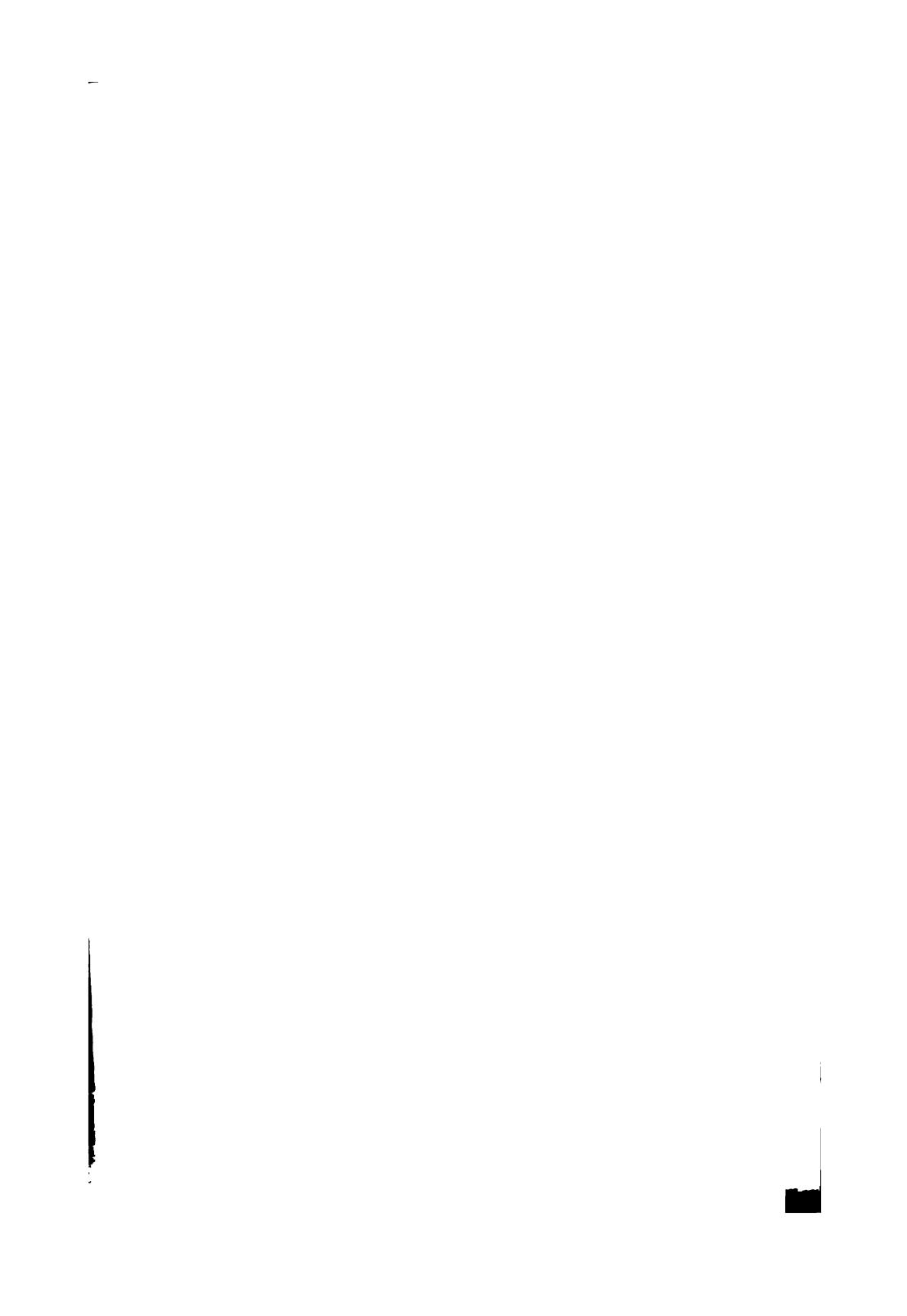






A BRAVE LADY.

VOL. I.



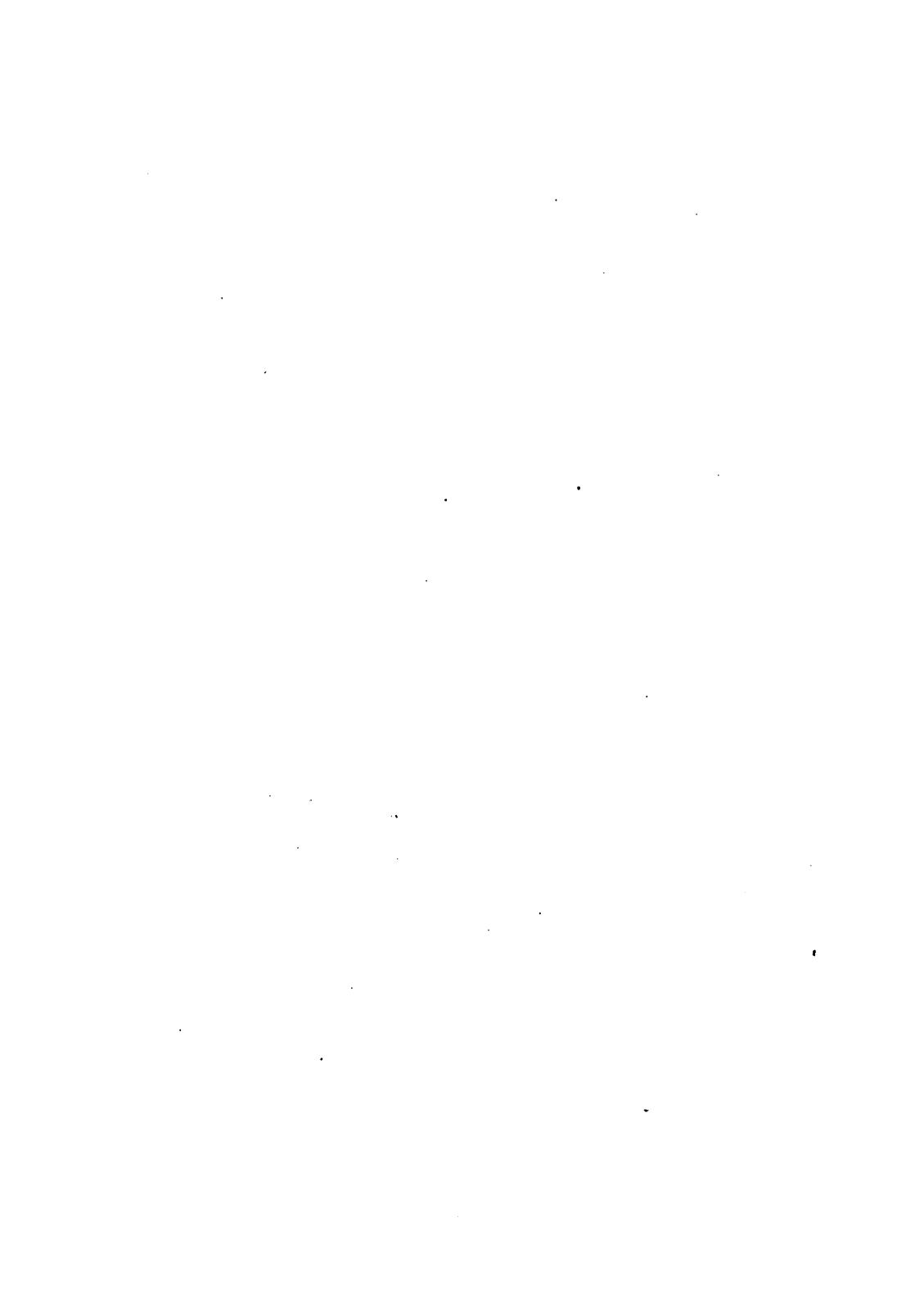
A BRAVE LADY.

VOL. I.



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A BRAVE LADY:

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN,”

&c. &c.

“Be thou faithful unto death.”

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

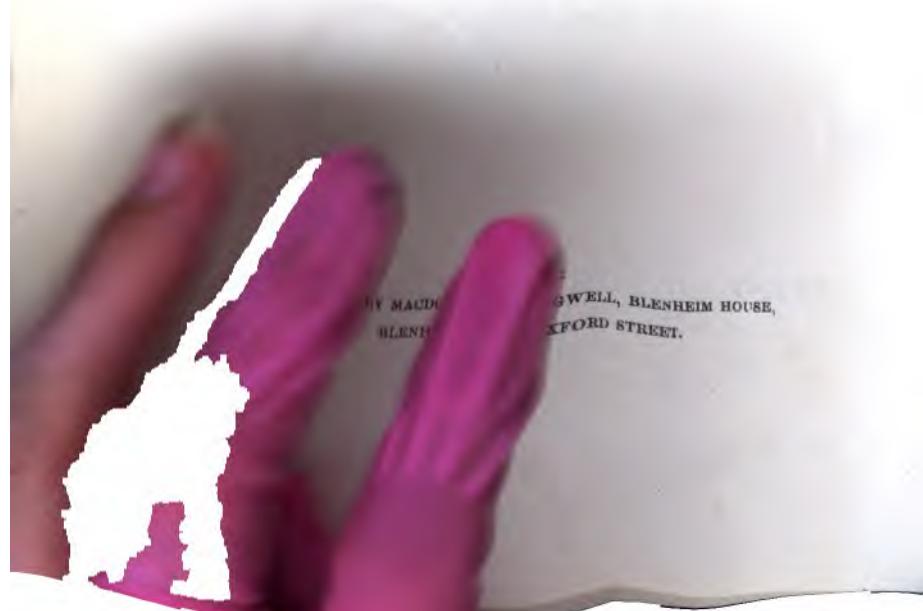


LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1870.

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250. y. 156



BY MACDOWELL,
BLENNHEIM,
OXFORD STREET.

To my Husband.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

To my Husband.

A BRAVE LADY.

THE PROLOGUE.

IN most, nay, I think in all lives, is some epoch, which, looking back upon, we can perceive has been the turning-point of our existence,—a moment when the imagination first wakes up, the feelings deepen, and vague, general impressions settle into principles and convictions; when, in short, our bias for good or ill is permanently given. We may not recognise this at the time, but we do afterwards, saying to ourselves, either with thankfulness or regret, “But for such and such a thing, or such and such a person, I should not have been what I am.”

This crisis befel me, Winifred Weston, when I was just entering my sixteenth year. It was

not “falling in love,” as in most cases it is;—and rightly, for love is, or ought to be, the strongest thing on earth ; but it was equivalent to it, and upon me and the moulding of my character it had precisely the same effect. Nay, in a sense I did really fall in love, but it was a very harmless phase of the passion ; for I was a commonplace damsel of sixteen, and the object of my intense admiration—nay, my adoring affection—was an old lady of seventy.

A young girl in love with an old woman ! What a ridiculous form of the emotion ! Not so ridiculous, my good friends, as at first appears ; and by no means so uncommon as you suppose. I have known several cases of it besides my own : cases in which a great difference in years and character drew out, to a remarkable degree, that ideal worship and passionate devotedness which is at the root of all true love, first love especially. Laugh as you will, there is always a spice of nobleness in the boy who falls in love with his “grandmother,” and I have often thought that one of the ex-

tenuating circumstances in the life of that selfish, pleasure-loving, modern heathen, Goethe, was the fact that in his old age he was so adored by a “child.”

Nor does the character of the feeling alter when it is only a woman’s towards a woman. I have loved a man, thank God, having found a man worth loving; but he well knows that for a long time he ranked second in my affections to a woman—to this woman, for whom my attachment had all the intensity of love itself.

She was, as I have said, quite old, even at the time when I first beheld her, which happened to be at church. Our pews were alongside of one another, for I sat in the rector’s, and she in the one beyond. I was the new curate’s daughter, and she was “the lady of the hall”—Brierley Hall, the oldest and finest place in the neighbourhood. She entered alone. Many of the fine families of the parish always had a footman to carry their prayer-books, but she carried her own; walked alone, stately and slow, up the aisle, and took her seat in a corner of the large,

musty pew, the cushions and linings of which, once a rich crimson cloth, had faded with the sunshine of indefinite summers. They contrasted strongly with the black of her garments—black, but not sombre ; her gown being of rich glittering silk, though she still wore a sort of widow's cap over her smooth, soft, white hair.

I knew who she was. Though my father and I had only been a week at Brierley, she was of sufficient importance there for us to have already heard about her—at least, as much as the village generally knew. I had been told I should be sure to see her in church, the only place where she ever was seen in public; and she had been described to me so minutely that my excited curiosity could not fail to recognise her at once.

Even had it been otherwise, I think the result would have been all the same. It was to be, and it was ; and I could not help it. I, the poor curate's daughter, motherless, romantic, solitary, brought up in the strictest seclusion, fell in love, desperately and determinedly, with

this beautiful old lady—Lady de Bougainville.

It was such a remarkable name too, and so exactly suited to her appearance. Let me describe her if I can.

She had “high” features, as they are called—that is, her nose was aquiline, and the outline of her cheek and chin sharply and clearly cut; likewise her mouth, which, though delicate, had much decision in it. It was a sad and firm rather than a sweet mouth; or rather it seemed as if it had been meant to be sweet, but the experience of life had hardened it. Nevertheless, the old softness could and did at times return; I saw it afterwards, not then. Sadness also was the characteristic of her eyes—sadness, or at any rate pensiveness. They put me in mind of the sea after a storm, when the waves have calmed down, and the surface has grown smooth, or even broken out again into little necessary ripples: but you know all the while there must be, somewhere or other, many a broken spar floating about; many a cast-away treasure beat-

ing against the beach ; many a dead carcase of ancient grief rising up from the depths below. Such did rise—and I fancied I could see them—in the dark eyes of this my beautiful lady—the most beautiful, I still think, that I ever beheld, though she was a septuagenarian.

Even now, as I vainly try to describe her, I feel my old infatuation return—the delight with which I watched every curve of her features—pale, colourless features—as un-English and peculiar as her eyes ; and admired every fold in her dress,—quite unlike any lady's dress I had ever seen. Her toilette was complete in all its details, as befitted both herself and her station. She was *chaussée et gantée* (the French best expresses what I mean ; we English merely *put on* gloves and shoes) to perfection ; and she had little hands and little feet—remarkably so for such a tall woman. She lost no inch of her height, and she carried her head like one who has never lowered it in shame or sycophancy before mortal man. “Aristocratic” undoubtedly would have been the adjective applied to her ;

but used in its right sense, as belonging to “the best” of the earth. There was nothing haughty about her, or repellent, or scornful—if these qualities are supposed to constitute aristocracy.

Her eyes and complexion, as I have said, were very un-English; and when she began to say the responses, it was with a slight, a very slight accent—French, I thought; but in nothing else was she foreign. Her dress was the ordinary dress of an English widow, from whose weeds Time has melted away the obnoxious pomposity of crape, and allowed a faint mixture of white and grey with the black. But it was black still—no bugles—no trimmings—no ornamental flipperies, which always seem such a mockery of mourning. Her costume was perfectly plain, perfectly simple, yet exceedingly rich; as was justifiable in a lady whose wealth was, people said, very great, and who had not a creature to inherit it after her.

For Lady de Bougainville was that sad sight, a widowed wife—a mother left childless. In her solitary old age she kept her forlorn state

in that huge house, which, many years ago, her husband, Sir Edward de Bougainville, had bought, rebuilt, lived in for a short time, and then died. Before then, by a succession of fatalities, her six children had died also. Thenceforward she, too, was as good as dead, socially speaking, to the little world of Brierley. She did not quit the Hall. She kept it up externally, much as before,—that is, none of the rooms were closed, and there was a sufficient establishment of servants. But she lived in it quite alone, never visited anywhere, nor invited anybody to visit her. So she passed her days, and had passed them—our gossiping landlady told me—for twenty years and more, the wonder and curiosity of the neighbourhood—this poor, lonely, wealthy woman—the envied, pitied, much revered, much criticised Lady de Bougainville.

Those who revered her were the poor, to whom she was unlimitedly charitable: those who criticised her were the rich, the county families with whom she had long ceased to associate, and the new-comers whom she never

sought to visit at all. These were naturally indignant that Brierley Hall should be shut up from them—that no dinner-parties should be given in the fine old dining-room where Charles II. was said to have taken a royal refection after hunting in the chase which surrounded the property. The younger generation likewise felt aggrieved that on such a beautiful lawn there should be no archery parties (croquet then was not), and no hope whatever of a ball in the tapestry-chamber, concerning which there were rumours without end ; for none of the present generation had ever seen it.

Once things had been very different. While Sir Edward was rebuilding the Hall, he inhabited a house near, and lived in a style suitable to his fortune, while his wife and family mingled in all the best society of the neighbourhood. They were exceedingly popular, being a large, merry family—handsome to look at, full of life and strength. Their father was less liked, being “rather queer,” people said, somewhat unsocial, and always fancying himself a great invalid.

But their mother shared in all their youthful enjoyments, and herself shone upon society like a star.—Vanished, too, almost as suddenly; for after a certain grand ball—a house-warming, the splendours of which the elder generation in the village remembered still, the master of Brierley Hall fell really ill of some mysterious ailment. “Something amiss here, folk said,” observed my informant, tapping her forehead; and after lingering, unseen by anybody, for many months, died, and was buried in Brierley churchyard. His monument, in plain white marble, without any of the fulsomeness common to epitaphs, was over his widow’s head every Sunday as she sat in the Hall pew.

There, too, was a second tablet, equally simple in form and inscription, recording the names, ages, and dates of death of her six children. They had everyone perished, some abroad, some at home, within a comparatively short space of time—dying off, as some families do die off, when all the probabilities seem in favour of

their continuing to remote generations a prosperous, healthy, and honourable race. When I read the list of names on the white tablet, and glanced thence at the mother's face, I no longer wondered at its sad expression, or at those "peculiarities," as people called them—which had made her the talk of the village, until it grew weary of talking, and let her alone.

At first, in the early years of her desolation, her neighbours had made many attempts, some from curiosity, some from pure kindness, to break through her determined seclusion; but they failed. She was neither uncourteous nor ungrateful, but there was about her a silent repelling of all sympathy, which frightened the curious and wore out the patience of even the kindest-hearted of these intruders. She let them see, plainly enough, that their visits were an intrusion, and that it was her intention to reappear in society no more.

She never did. Except at church on Sundays, or driving out along the most unfrequented roads, in her handsome old-fashioned carriage,

no one saw her beyond the limits of her own grounds. She was as little known as the Dalai Lama, and regarded with almost equal awe. Her smallest deeds were noticed, her lightest sayings recorded, and her very name uttered respectfully, as if she were a different person to the rest of the world.

She was. As I sat gazing at her during the whole of church-time, I felt that I never had seen, never should see, anybody like Lady de Bougainville.

It so happened that hitherto I had known very few women—that is, gentlewomen—partly because in the far-away parish where we had lived till we came here, there were only farm-houses, except the great house, which my father never let me enter. A certain sad prejudice he had—which I will no further allude to, except to say that, though I was motherless, my mother was not dead—made him altogether avoid female society. He had brought me up entirely himself, and more like a boy than a girl: in my heart I wished I was a boy, and rather despised

my own sex, until I saw Lady de Bougainville.

She, with her noble beauty, not weak, but strong; with her unmistakable motherly air, not the feeble fondness which is little better than an animal instinct, but that large protecting tenderness which makes one ready to defend as well as cherish one's offspring: she seemed to me a real woman—a real mother. And all her children were dead!

I did not presume to pity her, but my heart was drawn towards her by something deeper than the fascination of the eye. The fancy of sixteen can take a pretty long Queen Mab's gallop in two hours: by the time service was over I seemed to have been "in love" with her for years.

She walked down the aisle a little before rather than after the rest of the congregation, quitting the church among not the genteel but the poor people, who curtsied to her and were acknowledged by her as she passed, but she made and received no other recognition. Alone as she came she departed, and alone she ascend-

ed her carriage—one of those chariots swaying about on springs, such as were in fashion thirty years ago, with hammercloth in front and dickey behind. Her footman handed her in, and shut the door upon her with a sharp click, and an air as solemnly indifferent as that of the undertaker who closes a coffin-lid upon some highly respectable corpse whose friends have quitted the house—as I hear in fashionable houses they always do; and her coachman then drove her off, the sole occupant of this handsome carriage, as slowly as if he were driving a hearse.

After all there was something pathetically funereal in this state, and I should have hated it, and turned away from it, had I not been so fascinated by Lady de Bougainville herself. She burst upon my dull wearisome life—an interest so vivid, that it was an actual revelation. I went home to think about her all day, to dream of her at night; I drew her profile—how perfect it was, even though it was an old woman's face!—among the sums on my slate, and along the margins of

my Latin exercise-book. I kept my mind always on the *qui vive*, and my ears painfully open, to catch any floating information concerning her; but I was as shy of putting direct questions about her as if I had been a young man and she my first love. Do not laugh at me, you who read this; it is such a good thing to be "in love" with anybody. When we grow older we love in a quieter and more rational way; but even then we regard tenderly our early idolatries.

It seemed a long week till the next Sunday, and then I saw her again. Henceforward, from Sunday to Sunday, I lived in a sort of suppressed longing,—sure to be satisfied then; for, fair weather or foul, Lady de Bougainville was always in her place at church. Only upon Sundays was my fancy "with gazing fed;" but it fattened so rapidly upon that *maigre* diet that I went through all the preliminary stages of a real love-fever. Most girls have it, or something like it, and it rather does good than harm, especially if the

object is, as in my case, only a woman. Poor little lamb that she was—silly Winny Weston! I look back at her now as if she were some other person, and not myself; seeing all her faults, and all her good points too; and I beg it to be distinctly understood that I am not the least ashamed of her, or of her “first love” either.

That my idol should ever cast a thought towards me was an idea that never entered even my vivid imagination. She cast a glance occasionally,—that is, she looked over my head to the opposite wall, but I never suppose she saw me. However, this was of no consequence so long as I could see her, and speculate upon her, weaving long histories of which she was the heroine; histories over which I afterwards smiled to think how far they were from the truth! Then, having exhausted the past, I turned to the future and amused myself with conjuring up endless probabilities and fortuitous circumstances which might cause Lady de Bougainville and myself to meet, or enable me to do some heroic action for her, with or without

her knowledge—it did not matter much. Sometimes I pictured her horses starting off, and myself, little Winny Weston, catching hold of their bridles and preventing a serious accident; or some night there might arise a sudden gleam of fire among the trees whence peeped the chimneys of Brierley Hall, which I often watched from my bedroom window in the moonlight; and I pictured myself giving the alarm, and rushing to the spot just in time to save the house and rescue its aged mistress. Perhaps, after some such episode, she would just notice my existence, or if I did anything very grand, would hold out her hand and say—in the same clear voice which every Sunday besought mercy upon us “miserable sinners,” as if *she* could be a miserable sinner!—“Thank you, Winifred Weston.” Suppose I actually saved her life—who knows? she might do even more—open her arms to my motherless but yearning heart, and whisper, “Winifred, be henceforth my child!”

All this was very silly and very melodrama-

tic : yet it was better for me than many of the follies that one's teens are heir to—better than dancing and flirting into womanhood, buoyed up by the frothy admiration of raw young manhood. It taught me to love, rather than to crave for being loved ; and it taught me—if only through my imagination—two other things which I think the present generation rather loses sight of—heroism and patience.

That Lady de Bougainville herself was capable of both, I felt sure from her very face. The better I knew it, the more it fascinated me. It was an ideal face—nay, there was something in it absolutely historical, like one of those old portraits which you are convinced have a story belonging to them ; or to which you may affix any story you please. Calm as it was, it was neither a stony nor impassive face. Often, when something in my father's sermon attracted her—he preached very good and original sermons sometimes—she would brighten up, and fix upon him her dark eyes—keen and clear as if they were twenty-five years old instead of

seventy. But ordinarily she sat with them cast down; not in laziness, or pride, or scorn, but as if they were tired—tired of looking out upon the world for so many years. When lifted they had often a wistful and abstracted expression, as if she were living in times and places far away. As she said to me, months after, when I ventured to ask her what she did with herself—that is, when her daily work was done: “My dear, I dream. I have nothing to do but to dream.”

What first put it into her mind to notice me I have even now not the slightest idea. I suppose it was nothing but the impulse of her own kind heart: when, missing me from my seat at church, she inquired about me, and who I was: finally, hearing I was ill—of that most unpoetical complaint the measles—she did as she was in the habit of doing to almost every sick person in the village, sent daily to inquire and to offer gifts. Only these gifts came at first rather from the gardens and vineeries than the kitchen of Brierley Hall; until, some little bird having

perhaps whispered to her that a poor curate often feeds not quite so well as a prosperous artisan, there appeared gradually jellies, soups, and other nourishing aliments. When I learnt from whence they came, I banqueted upon them as if they were the ambrosia of the earth.

But they did not cure me; and I had been fully five weeks absent from church, when one Monday morning—oh, that blessed Monday!—there came a little note to my father—a note on delicate-coloured paper, with a small black seal, in a handwriting diminutive, upright, firm—more like foreign than English caligraphy. I have it still:—

“Lady de Bougainville presents her compliments to the Rev. Henry Weston, and would esteem it a pleasure if he would trust his daughter to her for a week’s visit. Brierley Hall was always considered a healthy place, and Lady de Bougainville has seen many sad instances of long ill-health, which a slight change of air at first might have cured. She will take the ut-

most care of the child" (here "the child" was crossed out, and "Miss Weston" inserted)—"if Mr. Weston will consent to part with her. The carriage shall fetch her at any hour to-day or to-morrow, so as to avoid all fatigue."

Most wonderful! The letter dropped from my trembling hands. Aladdin, Fortunatus, Cinderella—all those lucky youths and maidens befriended by fairies and good genii—were not more intoxicatingly happy than I.

"Father, you will let me go!" I cried. "Not to-day, perhaps" (for—it was a natural weakness—I suddenly remembered the state of my wardrobe; a condition not surprising in a poor curate's motherless daughter); "but to-morrow? You will send back word that I shall be ready by—let me see—by noon to-morrow?"

I always had everything pretty much my own way; so it was soon arranged that I should pay this—the first visit I had ever paid from home alone.

Young people who have many friends, and

are always interchanging visits, can have no idea of the state of excitement I was in. It seemed to rouse me out of invalidism at once. To go anywhere—to anybody, would have been charming ; but to Brierley Hall ! it was ecstacy ! To live under the same roof as my beautiful old lady—to see her every day in ordinary life —to be kindly noticed by her—to be able to render her various small services, such as a young person can so easily pay to an elder one ; the cup of my felicity was full. It was worth being ill—twenty times over. I thought—I think still, and, while laughing at myself, it is with tears in my eyes—that the measles was a special interposition of Providence. Not in any worldly point of view. In spite of all my land-lady's respectful and mysterious congratulations, I could see no special advantage likely to accrue to me from the visit ; but I accepted it as a present delight ; about which, and my own deservings of it, I did not speculate at all. In fact I took going to the Hall as naturally as I sup-

pose I shall one day take going to heaven ;—and it felt not unlike it.

My clothes were at first a serious weight on my mind ; they were so few, so poor, and—as, alas ! I only now seemed to discover—so untidy. When I thought of Lady de Bougainville, her silks, velvets, and furs, the richness of which was almost forgotten in their exquisite neatness and appropriateness, my heart failed me. Well, she was rich and I was poor ; but still that need not make such a vital difference. Even poor folk can contrive to keep their garments clean and whole. I must try to turn over a new leaf from this day forward.

So I mended and arranged, folded and packed, wishing faintly that I could put some womanly orderliness into my too boyish ways ; and this practical occupation kept my head steadily balanced, and levelled a little the heights and depths of excitement, the alternations of eager expectation and shyness almost amounting to fear, which came upon me. Yet the whole of the day I was in a fever of delight. I tried to

hide it, lest my father should think I was glad to leave him, this first time in my life that I ever had left him. But it was not that at all ; it was no carelessness as to old ties, only the dawning instinct for new ones—the same instinct which prompts the young bird to creep to the edge of even the warmest and safest nest, and peer over into the unknown world beyond. It may be a cold world—a dangerous, fatal world, wherein, many a day yet, we may wander about shivering, and long regretfully for the nest left behind. But for all that we cannot stay in the nest : God gives us wings, and when they grow we must use them ; whatever it costs us, we must learn to fly.

Nevertheless, when I had bidden my father good-bye—as solemn a good-bye as if I had been bound for the Antipodes—and sat alone in the Hall carriage, my heart failed me a little. Luxury was so new to me, I was half frightened by it. Yet was I not well-born ? Had not my forefathers driven about in carriages quite as grand as this one ? Besides, in my still feeble

health, the easy equipage, rolling lazily and smoothly along, gave me rather a pleasurable sensation. After the first minute or two I began to believe in the reality of my felicity ; and Aladdin as he rubbed his lamp, Cinderella as she leaned back in her pumpkin chariot, were not more full of happy hope than I.

As we drove through the village, and people stared at the Hall equipage passing at an unwonted hour, I first sat bolt upright in it, with a conscious pleasure that everybody should see me there; then I scorned myself for the mean vanity. It was better to hide my happiness in the deep of my heart, and the darkest corner of the carriage : so I leaned back, saying to myself in proud delight,

“ Nobody knows—nobody knows.”

For it seemed to me that the whole world, if they did know it, would envy me, thus going on a visit to Lady de Bougainville.

We reached the lodge-gates. I had often peeped through them at the mysterious region beyond, where the fine red-brick mansion glim-

mered through the green of the long elm-avenue ; and the trees which dotted the park cast their shadows on the smooth turf—making a picture which sometimes reminded me of the garden of the Hesperides.

Now, however, the gates flew open, and a very commonplace gardener's wife admitted us into the enchanted ground. It was such—it always will be such to me. As the carriage rolled slowly between those two lines of patriarchal elms, just dressing themselves anew in the soft green of early spring, I felt that the modern villas starting up around us so fatally fast, snug and smug, four-square, Portland cemented, with newly-painted palisades, and araucarias and deodaras stuck here and there in the fresh-made lawn, were no more to compare with Brierley Hall, than were their occupants, fat and well-to-do gentlemen, highly-dressed and highly-respectable ladies, with *my* Lady de Bougainville.

Could that be herself standing at the door ? No, of course not ; how could I have imagined such a condescension ?

Nevertheless, it was a friendly-smiling and pleasant person—a lady's-maid, but not the elderly Abigail one might have expected. Curiously enough, the domestics at Brierley Hall were, except one, all young servants.

“ My lady says, miss, that I am to take you straight to your bedroom, and see that you lie down and rest there till dinner-time—six o'clock. You shall have a cup of tea directly.”

I often fancy people know not half the mysteries of personal influence; and how curiously they themselves are reflected in their servants. This young woman—who was as civil as if I had been the Honourable Winifred Weston, come on a visit with my own maid, and a heap of luggage—took from me my small portmanteau, led the way across a wide hall, of which, in my bewildered nervousness, I only saw a glimmer of painted glass, green marble pillars, and polished oaken floors, up a beautiful staircase, and into a warm, fire-lit bedroom.

We all have our ideals, and this will be my

ideal bed-chamber to the end of my days. It was not large, at least not too large to feel cosy; and it was made still smaller by a subdivision: an arch, supported on Corinthian pillars, behind which was the bed and all the toilet apparatus, making a clear distinction between the sleeping and the social half of the room. In the latter, collected snugly round the hearth, were a sofa, a table, writing materials, books; a little encampment, on which the fire blazed welcomely, this chilly, grey, spring day. Above it, inserted into the wainscotted wall, was a curious oil painting, half length, life-sized, of some old saint. From the unkempt hair and beard, the leatherne girdle, and the robe of camel's hair, I concluded it was John the Baptist. A strange fancy to have him there, gazing with wan face, and gleaming, reproachful eyes that seemed ever crying "Repent ye," upon the luxuries of the room.

It appeared luxurious to me, for I had never beheld one anything equal to it. I was half amused, half annoyed, to see how many neces-

saries of civilized life I had hitherto done without; toilette appliances of mysterious kind; endless drawers, closets, and shelves in which to stow away my poor property; mirrors and hand-glasses, reflecting everywhere my humble person, gaunt with the awkwardness of my age, ill-dressed, unlovely. Then the bed, which was of foreign make, with a graceful canopy, rich damask hangings, and a counterpane of quilted silk. How could I ever go to sleep in it?

At first, I own, my novel position quite frightened me. But when I had drank my tea, unpacked myself—declining assistance through sheer shame—and arranged my garments as carefully and as widely as I could upon their numerous receptacles, after having taxed my mother-wit to the utmost in discovering the uses of all these things, so as not to be disgraced in the eyes of housemaid or lady's-maid, then I took heart of grace. I said to myself, “Winny Weston, you are a fool. All these things are mere externalities. They could not make you a lady, if you were not one; and, if

you are, the lack of them will not unmake you. Pluck up your courage, and do the best you can."

So I curled myself up comfortably on the sofa, and lay gazing at the delicious fire! Ah, that luxury, the permanent bed-room fire! I had never been allowed it yet; it never would have occurred to me to have it, except in case of illness; but here it was apparently the custom of the house, and anyone of a solitary, shy nature can best appreciate the intense comfort, the delicious peace, of being able to shut one's door upon all the world, and warm one's soul and body thoroughly at one's own particular bed-room fire.

Lady de Bougainville had done a kind thing in leaving me to myself until dinner-time. But to "lie down and rest," according to her orders, which the maid had given with an air as if nobody ever was expected to gainsay anything the mistress said—was impossible; rest is for a later period of life than mine. In an hour I had exhausted all the delights of fireside medi-

tation, all the interest of my room, including the views from my two windows, and was dying with curiosity to penetrate further.

I opened the door and peeped out, as timidly as a young mouse on her travels. All was silent, as silent as Tennyson's Sleeping Palace. Why should I not creep downstairs, just to examine the staircase and hall?

I delight in a fine wide staircase; it is the lungs of a house. I am sure people who plan grand reception rooms with narrow ascents thereto, must have rather narrow minds. The planner of this had not. As I looked over the balustrade of carved oak—carved as beautifully as Grinling Gibbons could have done it—and then upwards to the circular ceiling, over which flying Cupids were hanging wreaths, and downwards to the broad polished stairs, winding step after step in smooth dignified progression—I thought of the lovely ladies passing up and down it with their sweeping trains, their high head-dresses, like that in my great-grandmother's portrait; escorted by gentlemen—such gentlemen as were

Sir Charles Grandison. And I thought then—I fear I think now—that these were far finer specimens of humanity, inside and outside, than the young men and women whom I shall meet at the next dinner party I go to, or have to see flirting with my sons and daughters—when old enough—at the next ball.

Descending, I gazed left and right across the hall, which ran right through the centre of the house from door to door. Great windows lit it at either end, large panes of stained glass, forming shapes not unlike crosses: one red and blue—the sacred colours, such as old painters always gave to their Madonnas—the other violet and green. Supporting the hall in the middle were double pillars of scagliola marble; its walls were of some soft grey papering, with Pompeian figures grouped here and there; and across the wide space of its dark oak floor ran rivers of carpeting, cutting it up a little, but just enough to make it safe. Only French feet can glide across those slippery plains of polished wood, beautiful as they are. Mine failed me

more than once; and in the perfect silence and solitude I felt—not altogether comfortable, yet deliciously, ecstatically happy.

There is a belief among modern psychologists—one of whom has lately developed it in a novel—that we are none of us wholly individual or original beings, but made up of our countless antecedents; whose natures, combined or conflicting, we partake, and often feel struggling within us. As if we were not ourselves at all, but somebody else—some far-back progenitor, whose soul was new-born into our infant body, to work us weal or woe, and influence us more or less throughout life;—a creed not more impossible or ridiculous than many other scientific theories.

As I stood for the first time in this house, gradually it seemed to become familiar and natural. Large and fine as it was, it was a *house*, not a baronial residence. In it I felt myself a mere drop of water, but it was water conscious of rising to its level. The soul of my great-grandmother seemed to enter into me; and I

thought, in my silly, childish heart, that if I only had a train I could sweep up the beautiful staircase with as grand an air as she. Ay, and enjoy it, too. So absorbed was I in my foolish dream, that I drew myself up to my full height, and shook out my scanty cotton frock, trying to imagine myself one of those ladies, like my said great-grandmother, whose miniature with the rose in her hair, I knew so well.

At that luckless moment I heard an outer door open—and in walked Lady de Bougainville.

I knew it was she, though she looked, of course, in her home dress and garden wraps, different from what she looked in church. But she was one of those people who seem to make their costume instead of their costume making them. Whatever she had on, she was sure to be the same.

I half hoped her eye would not discover me, but I was mistaken. She came forward at once.

“Is that you, my little visitor?” and she put

out her hand—her old soft hand, the softest, I think, I ever felt, though it was withered and thin, so that the jewelled rings hung loosely on every finger—“I thought you were safe resting in your room. What have you been doing?—Where were you going?”

Sweet as her voice was—sweet as when uttering the responses in church—there was in it the tone of the mistress and mother, accustomed all her life to be answered and obeyed.

I answered at once—though in a hot agony of confusion, which makes me even now pity myself to remember—

“I was not going anywhere, my lady.”

She smiled.

“Don’t say ‘my lady,’ the servants only do that. If you call me ‘ma’am’—as I was taught to say to my elders when I was a girl—it will do quite well.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“And what shall I call you? Miss Weston, or simply Winifred?”

“Winifred, please, ma’am—nothing but Wini-

fred!" cried I, my delight suddenly making me bold.

Then I shrank back into myself with a wild collapse of shame.

She took no notice of it, except just to pat me on the shoulder, saying,

"Very well, Winifred;" and then began asking a courteous question or two about my father.

So my heart, which had at first beat in my bosom like a little steam-engine, slowly quieted itself down, and I recovered sufficiently to be able to look up in my hostess's face, to hear and answer intelligently, and even to take in the minutiae of her dress and appearance.

What a picture of an old lady she was! If all old ladies did but know the wisdom of recognising the time when a woman should cease following fashion's changes, except in a very modified form, and institute, so far as she can, a permanent costume! Lady de Bougainville's was charming. Not exactly old-fashioned; neither of this year nor that year, nor the year be-

fore, but suited to all years, and looking well at all seasons. It was excessively simple, consisting only of a black silk gown, without trimmings of any sort, but the material was so rich and good that none were required. It fitted her figure—which was slender and straight, even at seventy years of age ; and she was so upright, that walking behind her you might have taken her for a woman of thirty. At throat and wrists she had a sort of frill, made of fine cambric and Valenciennes lace. Over her widow's cap was drawn a garden-hood, or *capuchon*, such as Frenchwomen wear. A French shawl, of fine soft black merino, fell round her in comfortable folds. Indeed, there was something about her toilette essentially French. We had happened to live three months in that country—my father and I —just before we came to Brierley, so I was able to detect this fact ; and also a small *soupçon* of an accent which developed itself more the more she spoke, and gave her speech, as a slight foreign accent always gives to otherwise correct English, a certain pretty individuality.

As she stood before me, and talked to me, in her ordinary home dress, and upon ordinary subjects, but looking none the less stately and beautiful than she had done in church for Sunday after Sunday, I felt as bewildered and entrapt as would a little nun, who suddenly sees the Virgin Mary or St. Catherine step down from her niche, and become every-day womanhood.

When I had grown a little less afraid of her, and had succeeded in answering all her questions—very harmless, commonplace questions, about my father's health and my own, but given with a kind of tender graciousness, and an earnestness over the replies, which great people do not always show to little people,—she put to me a second inquiry, or rather a repetition of the first, which frightened me as much as ever.

For I felt it must be answered, and truly, even if untruth had occurred to me as one way of getting out of the difficulty ;—which it did not. Lying usually springs from cowardice, and, girl as I was, I had never yet been afraid

of any mortal soul. So when Lady de Bougainville asked, with a covert smile, what I was doing when she caught sight of me, I confessed, silly as I knew the confession must make me appear—

“I was trying to walk upstairs as if I had a train. I wanted to fancy myself my great-grandmother.”

“And who was your great-grandmother ?” asked she, laughing a little, but not in the way I had expected and feared.

“A very beautiful woman, I believe, and very rich.”

“Ah !” drawing back at once, “I thought your family was poor ?”

“So it is now, but it was not always.”

And I explained to her one or two traditions of the departed glory of the Westons, on which my imagination had always hung with great delight. To which she listened without comment, and apparently without being affected with them in any way ; then asked—

“And your great-grandmother ?”

"She was," I repeated, "a very beautiful woman ; and she lived in a house which I suppose must have been like yours. I was wondering how she felt in it."

"Indeed. Then, Winifred, would you like to be your great-grandmother ?"

I stopped to consider, for I could not bear to speak inaccurately, even at random.

"For some things I should, ma'am ; not for all."

"Why not for all ?"

"I have heard she was not a very happy woman."

"Few women ever are very happy," said, with a slight sigh, which amazed me as much as her words, Lady de Bougainville.

Of course, I did not presume to reply ; and immediately afterwards she changed the subject entirely, and began to speak to me about my own health, and the arrangements she had made for me in the house, with a view to my deriving as much benefit from the change as possible. Her questions, suggestions, and ad-

vices were all extremely practical and minute, even to the most motherly degree. I did not know what motherhood was then—the tie, both ways, from child to mother, and from mother to child, was to me a perfect blank; but I had sense enough to have guessed instinctively, even had I not known the fact, that she who thus spoke to me had been the mother of many children; and that the heart once opened, in a way that only motherhood does open it, nothing afterwards could altogether close. Her very eyes, as they rested upon me, had a pensive tenderness in them, as if beyond my face they saw another. Some women have that expression whenever they look at a child; it reminds them either of the dead or the lost—or, perhaps as sadly, of the never born.

I answered obediently my hostess's questions, though they surprised me a little. I mean, it was puzzling to find out that my idol was not too ideal to condescend to such ordinary things; in fact, was much more of a mortal woman than I expected. She appeared to me now not so

much a mediæval saint as a wise sensible mother of a family, something like that most sensible and capable woman in the Proverbs, whose portrait, transmitted to us from distant ages, proves that the Hebrews at least had some notion of what a woman ought to be, and did not accept as their notion of feminine perfection a charming, amiable, beautiful—fool !

Looking closer at Lady de Bougainville, it was easy to detect under all her refinement an amount of strength which circumstances might drive into actual hardness ; while against her high, pure, lofty nature might be laid the charge which inferior natures often do lay, that she could not understand them, and had no pity for them. May be so ! In her clear, bright, honest eyes lurked the possibility of that cutting contempt for all things weak, and base, and double-faced, which a mean person would find difficult to meet ; and the delicate line of her lips could settle into a mouth, firm enough to shame all cowards—a mouth like my pet heroine, Catherine Seyton's, when she put her slender right

arm as a bar through the bolts of the door, to protect those who needed her protection. Lady de Bougainville, I was sure, would have done the same any day.

I was not old enough fully to take in her character then, and I greatly fear that in many things I write about her now, I am giving not so much my impressions of the time as my observations and convictions of a later period; but, child as I was, I could appreciate that force of nature which was able to deny as well as bestow, to blame as much as to praise.

She blamed me unequivocally for having disobeyed her orders, and quitted my room, and would not listen for a moment to my excuses, which in their earnest honesty seemed to amuse as well as please her:—that I was longing to go all over her beautiful house, the biggest and most beautiful I had ever seen in my life.

“Indeed. Yours must have been a quiet life, then, child. What sort of home did you live in?”

“In no home at all,” I said mournfully, “only

in furnished lodgings. And oh, if you did but know what it is to spend month after month, year after year, in furnished lodgings!"

She smiled. "Then you have never been anything but poor, my dear? Is it so?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"That is an honest answer. Poverty is no shame; the shame is for those who think this, and fear to acknowledge it. Still it is a hard thing to bear sometimes."

"Indeed I have found it so," cried I, warmed by such unexpected sympathy. "I don't like it at all, but I bear it."

Lady de Bougainville laid her hand, her delicate dear old hand, upon my head. "Poor little thing," she murmured: "*pauvre petite.*" But the minute she had let fall the latter words, she turned away from me. I did not know till long afterwards that she had been in the habit of speaking French to her children.

Presently she addressed me with a sudden and quite uncalled for asperity of tone.

"So you are poor, Winifred, and you would

like to be rich. Do not deny it. I hate prevarication—I despise shams. Say outright, you foolish child, that you wish you were in my place, and lived in the Hall,—perhaps even were mistress of it, as I am, and have been these many years. What a fortunate, happy woman I must be!"

There was a keen sarcasm in her voice which actually startled me; but immediately she became conscious that she was speaking in a way very unsuitable for a child to hear, and incomprehensible to most children. Only I think that we who have spent our childhood either with grown people or quite alone, get a certain precocity of intuition, sharper and more accurate than is supposed. I should have been acute enough at guessing much concerning Lady de Bougainville, had I not been frightened by her witch-like faculty of divining what was passing in my own mind. For I was painfully conscious of having done exactly as she said, and broken the tenth commandment over and over again that morning.

"Do not blush so," she went on. "You have done nothing very heinous, child, even if you have wished to step into my shoes, or to inherit my fortune and estate. I should consider such a fancy neither wicked nor unnatural at your age. Only if it really happened I should be very sorry for you."

"Sorry!"

Her hand, firmer in its grasp than I could have thought possible to such soft fingers, was pressed on my shoulder; and her dark eyes, no longer wild, but piercing, penetrated down to the very depths of mine:

"Now, child, pay attention to me for a minute, that we may begin our acquaintance on a sure footing. You are nothing to me, and I am nothing to you, except that I was sorry for you, as seventy is sorry for sixteen. But I see you are of a very imaginative temperament, as full of romantic notions as any girl of sixteen can be, and I know what that is—I was sixteen myself once. But I warn you, Winifred, build no castles in Spain at Brierley Hall. Do not

fancy, because I invited you here to nurse you well again, and send you back home fit to battle with life, as is your lot, that I have taken a mysterious interest in you, and intend to adopt you, and make you my heiress."

"Ma'am ! Lady de Bougainville!"

She had been sitting on one of the hall chairs, and I on the staircase in front of her; but now I started up, and looked her full in the face. Child as I was, my indignation made me a woman for the moment—a woman, and her equal. I did not condescend even to rebut her accusation ; I stood a minute, feeling myself grow hot and hotter, to the very roots of my hair, and then I darted away, and rushed violently upstairs.

"Winifred, child, where are you running to?"

"To fetch my bonnet. I am going home."

But in the effort of speech I broke down, and before I reached my room door I had only strength to totter in, and bury my head in the sofa cushions in a paroxysm of tears.

How long they lasted I do not know, but my

first consciousness was a kind, cool hand on my head, and a soft voice calling me by my name. Lady de Bougainville was standing over me, looking grave and grieved, but not displeased at all. Nor amused, as many persons would have been, at this passion of almost ludicrous anger in a young girl, little more than a child. She held out her hand, smiling.

“I was mistaken, I see. Do not take it so seriously to heart. May not an old woman talk nonsense if she likes?”

“It was nonsense, then? You did not really think I came here with such ideas in my head? You do not suppose me capable of such meanness? I don’t say,” continued I, for in all my wrath I was still candid; “I don’t say that I should not like to be as rich as you—I should; and I have thought so many a time this day. But I never wanted *your* riches. Keep them yourself! For me, I despise them.”

“So do I,” she said, with an air of gentleness, even sadness, which to me was then wholly unaccountable.

She added no other word, but stood by me, firmly holding my hand, and looking down on me with a curious mixture of interest and compassion, until my sobs abated. But the result of the storm of indignation into which I had thrown myself, was, as might be expected for one just recovering from severe illness, anything but satisfactory. I fell into a sort of hysterical state, which soon made me quite incapable of going downstairs, or even of stirring from my sofa. My hostess tended me there, fetching no servant, but taking all the trouble of me upon herself for two or three hours;—of which I remember little, except that she seemed to be quite another person than my preconceived idea of her. She soothed me, she scolded me, she made me take food and medicine; finally she put me to bed like a baby, and sat beside me, reading, or pretending to read, till I fell asleep. I did not wake till broad daylight next morning.

It was a delicious waking—like dawn after a thunder-storm. My window faced the east, and

the early sun looked in ; while, without, the birds sang their cheerful songs with the especial loudness that one hears on a spring morning. I felt tired, and not quite myself, but scarcely ill. In truth, I hated to be ill, or to be kept in bed one minute longer than necessary. So before any one could restrain me, I had leaped out, and was already up and dressed when a knock came to my door. It was the maid, entering with my breakfast.

I was a little disappointed that it was only the maid, but I got a message, at all events.

“ My lady wishes to know if you are better, miss ? and, if you are, she will not disturb you till noon. She herself is always busy of a morning.”

Was it out of consideration for me and my shyness, or had my tender, motherly nurse of the night before changed back into my idol of the church pew—my noble, stately, reserved, and unapproachable Lady de Bougainville ? I could not tell, but I accepted my lot, whatever it was. I implicitly obeyed her ; and, though

the imprisonment was dreadful, I did not stir from my room until the cuckoo-clock on the chimney-piece—oh, how I love a cuckoo-clock!—had struck twelve. Then out I darted, to snatch, eager and happy, at the delights that lay before me.

Not quite happy, though, for it struck me that I had made a goose of myself the previous evening; but still this little episode, so uncomfortable and so unexpected, had had one good result—it had broken down the barrier between my idol and me, and taken away my dread of her, and put a certain sympathy between us, in spite of the alarming difference of our years. How or why I did not know, not till long afterwards; but I felt it was so. Still, when once again I descended the stairs—not making such a little fool of myself as heretofore, but walking sagely and rationally, like a respectable young lady—and saw, as yesterday, that tall black figure entering in from the garden door, my heart beat a little with the old throb—half pleasure, half awe, but wholly love. I wonder if any

man ever loved the sight of me as I did that of this lovely old woman ?

She advanced with her smiling welcome, formal a little, but always smiling. I came afterwards to know what a better welcome was, to have her arms round my neck, and her kiss on my cheek ; but I like to remember the earlier welcomes,—just the simple handshake, and the kindly inquiry, written at once on lips and eyes.

Some people say “ How do you do ? ” and never wait to hear the answer, which you can omit altogether, if you choose—they will never miss it. But she always looked as if she liked to hear—as if she really was interested in learning how you were, and what you were doing—as if the large sympathy which even seventy years had neither narrowed nor dulled, took an interest in every minute thing you could tell her, and cared for your fortunes as if they had been her own.

After an inquiry or two, which she saw rather shamed and confused me, she ceased speaking of the little episode of last night, and took up

the thread of our acquaintance precisely where we had left it yesterday.

“ You were wanting to see my house ; shall I show it you now ? There will be quite time before luncheon.”

“ Will it not tire you too much ?”

For I noticed that she looked extremely pale, and the dark circles under her eyes were deeper, as if she had been awake all night.”

“ Are you tired, Winifred ?”

“ Oh ! no, thank you, ma’am.”

“ Then never mind me. When I was young, I used to be told I was a Spartan,” added she, smiling ; “ and I try to be something of a Spartan still, in spite of my age. I could never endure to sink into the invalid or doting old woman. I hope I shall manage to die like that grand old philosopher who, in his last moment, started up from his arm-chair, and said ‘ he would die standing.’ ”

She woudl, I thought, as I looked at her, so erect still, with her feet planted firmly, and her eyes flashing bright.

I said, with a conceited sense of my own erudition, that there was something very fine in dying, like Macbeth, "with harness on one's back."

Lady de Bougainville looked amused.

"You read Shakespeare, I see?"

"Oh! I read everything."

"Everything is a large word. Now, I have not read half enough in my life. I am not at all an educated person."

I stared in utter amazement.

"It is quite true, my dear; or rather, for educated I should have said 'learned,' or 'cultivated.' We get our education in many other ways besides reading books. But come, you will be more interested in my house than in me."

"Are you not very fond of your house, ma'am?"

"Perhaps I am. I like to have things suitable and beautiful about me. Pretty things were always good company to me; now they are the only company I have."

Then it was quite true that she received no

one ; that I was the sole guest who had been admitted into these precincts for years ? I could hardly credit my own good fortune. And when I went with her, from room to room, talking familiarly, and hearing her talk—which was the greatest treat of all—I was almost bewildered with my happiness.

Her home seemed so completely a portion of herself, that in telling of her I cannot help telling of it likewise, and should like to describe it minutely.

It was a house such as was used to be built by the landed gentry a century or two ago, just when the type of Elizabethan houses—poetical, but not too comfortable—was merging into that of modern convenience : convenience degenerating into luxury. It was not Gothic at all—had no queer corners—its general plan being four-square ; the four reception-rooms making the outside angles, with the large central hall between. Some people might say it was not a picturesque house, but it was what I call an honest house ; in which everything feels real,

substantial and sound; well built, well ventilated; with high ceilings and airy passages, giving one breathing room and walking room; plenty of windows to see out of, and snug recesses to creep into; warm solid walls, and wide hospitable fireplaces: in short, a house containing every requisite for a home and a family—a large, merry, happy household—contented in itself, and on good terms with the world outside. And in it Lady de Bougainville lived—all alone.

She took me from room to room, explaining the plan of the whole house, and showing me the ground-floor apartments; drawing-room, dining-room, morning-room, library. All were in perfect order: even the fires laid in the grates, ready to be kindled in a moment, to welcome a large family, or a houseful of guests. And then we went slowly up the beautiful staircase, and she pointed out the exquisite oak carvings, the painted panels, and highly-decorated ceilings; telling me how they had been found covered up with plaster, whitewash, and

other barbarisms of the last century ; what pains she had taken to disinter them, and restore them to their original state. In describing, she regarded them with a curious tenderness—like one who has grown fond of inanimate objects—probably from having long had only inanimate objects to love.

I ventured no questions ; but I must have looked them, for once, turning suddenly to me, she said,

“I dare say you think this a large house for one old woman to live in—large and gloomy and empty. But it does not feel empty to me. When one has lived seventy years, one is sure to have, whether alone or not, plenty of companions ; and it depends much upon oneself whether they are pleasant company or not. I am quite content with mine. No, I did not mean ghosts”—(seeing doubtless a shade of slight apprehension on my face, for, like all imaginative, solitary children, I had suffered horribly from supernatural fears.) “I assure you, Winifred, my house is not haunted ; I have no

ghosts; at least, none that you will see. Besides, you are too much of a woman to have a child's sillinesses. How old did you say you were? I forget."

I told her, sixteen.

"I was married the day I was sixteen."

Then for fifty-four years she must have been Lady de Bougainville. I longed to inquire further; to find out what her maiden name was, what her husband had been like, and how they fell in love with one another. They must have been such young lovers, for I had discovered, by arithmetical calculations from the date on his monument, that he was only about five years older than she. How I longed to hear it—this love-story of half a century ago; interesting and delicious as all love-stories are to girls of my age, eager to go the way their mothers and grandmothers went, only believing that with themselves the great drama of life would be played out in a far higher manner: as it never has been played before.

I craved for even a word or two concerning

the past to fall from those lips—what sweet lips they must have been when, at only sixteen, they repeated the marriage-vows!—but none did fall. The love-story never came. And, kind as she was, there was something about my hostess which at once excited and repressed curiosity. What she chose to reveal, of her own accord, was one thing; but to attempt to extract it from her was quite another. You felt that at the first daring question she would wither you with her cold rebuke, or in her calm and utterly impassive courtesy speak of something else, as if she had never heard you. The proof-armour of perfect politeness—as smooth and glittering as steel, and almost as invulnerable—was hers, to a degree that I never saw in any other woman.

Though from the very beginning of our acquaintance, either from some instinctive sympathy, or from the natural tendency of old age to go back upon its past, especially to the young, with whom it can both reveal and conceal as much as it chooses, Lady de Bougainville often

let fall fragments of her most private history, which an ingenious fancy could easily put together and fit in, so as to arrive at the truth of things—a much deeper truth than she was aware of having betrayed—still, in all my relations towards her I never dared to ask her a direct question. She would have repelled and resented it immediately.

So, even on this first day, I had the sense to be content with learning no more than she condescended to tell me : in fact I did little else than follow her about the house, and listen while she talked.

Her conversation at once charmed and puzzled me. It was more “like a book,” as the phrase is, than any person’s I had ever met ; yet it sounded neither stilted nor affected. It was merely that, from long isolation, she expressed herself more as people write or think than as they talk. This, not because she was very learned—I believe she was quite correct in saying she had never been a highly-educated woman—the cleverness in her was not acquired, but

original; just as her exquisite refinement was not taught, but inborn. Yet these two facts made her society so interesting. Conversing with her and with every-day people was as different as passing from Shakespeare to the daily newspaper.

It was impossible that such an influence should not affect a girl of my age and disposition—suddenly, decisively, overwhelmingly. I still recall, with an intoxication of delight, that soft spring morning, that sunny spring afternoon—for, luncheon over, we went wandering about the house again—when I followed her like a dog from room to room, growing every hour more fascinated, and attaching myself to her with that dog-like faithfulness, which some one (whom I need not now refer to, but who knows me pretty well by this time) says is a part of my nature. Well, well, never mind! It might be better, and it might be worse—for me and for others—that I have this quality. I do not think it was the worse, at any rate for her—my dear Lady de Bougainville.

I fancy she rather liked having even a dog-like creature tracking her steps, and looking up in her face,—she had been alone so long. Old as she was, and sad as her life must have been, by nature she was certainly a cheerful-minded person. There was still a curious vitality and elasticity about her, as if in her heart she liked being happy, and seeing other people the same.

She especially enjoyed my admiration of the tapestry-room, a large *salon*—the French would call it; and the word dropped out of her own lips unawares, convincing me more and more of what I did not dare to inquire—her French extraction. She told me, when she first came to Brierley Hall, which had been bought from the Crown, to whom the estate had fallen due, after two centuries of wasteful possession by the heirs of some valiant soldier, to whom a grateful monarch had originally presented it,—this room was covered with the commonest papering, until some lucky hole made her discover underneath what looked like tapestry. Further search laid bare six beautiful pieces of work, in perfect preservation,

let into the wall like pictures ; just as they hung there now, in the soft faded colouring which gives to old tapestry a look at once so beautiful, and tender, and ghostly ; as if one saw hovering over every stitch the shadow of the long-dead fingers that sewed it.

“How glad you must have been,” I said, “when you tore down the horrid papering, and found out all this !”

“Yes, I was very glad. I liked all old things. Besides,” she went on, “the tapestry is fine in itself; Vandyke even might have designed it. Possibly one of his pupils did : it seems about that period. See, how well they are drawn, these knights and ladies, kings and queens, foresters with their falcons, horsemen with their steeds. Such a whirl as it is, such numerous figures, so life-like, and so good !”

“And what does it all mean, ma’am ?”

“Nobody knows ; we have never been able to make out. In some things it might answer to the story of Columbus. Here is a man like him coming before a king and queen—Ferdi-

nand and Isabella ; they are sitting crowned, you see ; and then this looks like his meeting with them afterwards, laden with the riches of the New World. But all is mere guess-work ; we have no data to go upon. We used to guess endlessly about our new tapestry the first year, then we accepted as it was, and guessed no more. But think—" and she stood gazing dreamily at these faint-coloured, shadowy, life-size figures, which seemed to make the wall alive —“think of all the years it took the artist to design, the sempstresses to complete that tapestry, and now their very names are forgotten—nay, we cannot even find out what their handiwork meant to portray ! They and it are alike ghosts, as we all shall be soon. ‘Man goeth about like a shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain.’”

“Yes,” I said ; and with the “priggishness ” of youth, being conceited over my knowledge of the Bible, I added the remainder of the text : “‘he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them.’”

The moment I had uttered the words I felt that I had made a mistake—more than a mistake, it was an actual cruelty; one of those chance stabs that we sometimes give to the people we love best, and are most tender over;—which afterwards we would give the world to recall: and, though it was done most harmlessly, and in pure ignorance, grieve over and feel as guilty about as if we had committed an actual crime.

I saw I had somehow unawares struck Lady de Bougainville to the very heart. Not that she showed it much; she did not speak—no, I forget, I think she did speak, making some commonplace remark about my familiarity with Scripture; but there came a grey shadow all over her face, the features quivered visibly, she turned away, and suddenly sat down on the broad window-sill, clasping her arms together on her lap, and looking out at the view;—then, beyond the view, up to the rosy floating clouds of the spring sunset, until gradually its beauty seemed to soothe her, and take away her pain.

By-and-by I ventured to ask, chiefly to break the silence, whether she ever sat in this room. It was a very large room, with six windows, and a good view from each; but its size and ghostliness, and the dim figures on the walls, would make it rather "eerie" to sit in, especially of evenings.

"Do you think so, child? I do not. I often stay here, quite alone, until bed-time. Would you like to see my bed-room? Perhaps you will think that a more 'eerie' place still."

It certainly was. As large fully as the tapestry-room, out of which you passed into it by a short flight of stairs. It was divided in the centre by pillars, between which hung heavy curtains, which at pleasure could be made completely to hide the bed. And such a bed!—a catafalque rather—raised on a dais, and ascended by steps. To enter it would have been like going to bed in Westminster Abbey, and waking up in it one would have felt as if one were a dead hero lying in state.

What an awful place! I asked timidly if

she really slept in that room, and alone ?

“ Oh ! yes,” she answered. “ The servants inhabit a different part of the house. Once, when I was ill, this winter, my maid wanted to sleep in a corner there ; she is a good girl, and very fond of me, but I would not let her. I prefer being alone. Seventy,” she added, smiling, “ is not so nearly fearful of solitude as sixteen.”

“ And you are really not afraid, ma’am ?”

“ What should I be afraid of ? my own company, or the company of those ghosts I spoke of ? which are very gentle ghosts, and will never come to you, child,” and once more she laid her hand upon my head. I think she rather liked my curls ; she said they were “ pretty curls.” “ Child, when you are as old as I am, you will have found out that after all we must learn to be content with loneliness. For, more or less, we live alone, and assuredly we shall die alone. Who will go with us on that last, last journey ? Which of our dear ones have we been able to go with ? We can but take

them in our arms to the awful shore, see them slip anchor and sail away—whither?—We know not."

"But," I whispered, "God knows!"

Lady de Bougainville started, as if my simple words had cast a sudden light into her mind.

"Yes, you are right," she said, "it is good for us always to remember that: we cannot at first, but sometimes we do afterwards. So,"—turning her eyes on the great catafalque of a bed, with its massive draperies and nodding plumes—"I lie down every night, and rise up every morning, quite content; thinking, with equal content, that I shall some day lie down there, to rise up no more."

I was awed. Not exactly frightened: there was nothing to alarm one in that soft measured voice, talking composedly of things we do not usually talk about, and which to young people seem always so startling—but I was awed. I had never thought much about death; had never come face to face with it. It was still to me the mysterious secret of the universe, rather beautiful

than terrible. My imagination played with it, often enough, but my heart had never experienced it,—not like hers.

Finding nothing to say that seemed worth saying, I went round the room ; examining the pictures which hung upon its walls. They seemed all portraits, of different sizes and sorts, from crayon sketches and black silhouettes to full-length oil paintings—of young people of different ages, from childhood to manhood and womanhood. They had the interest which attaches to all portraits, bad, good, or indifferent, more than to many grander pictures ; and I stood and looked at them, wondering who they were, but not daring to inquire, until she solved my difficulty by saying, as we went out of the room :

“These are my children.” Not “these *were*,” but “these *are*.”—Her six dead children.

And their father ?

I did not ask about him, and there was certainly no portrait in the room which could possibly have been Sir Edward de Bougainville. Once or twice, in showing me the house, she had

cursorily mentioned his name, "Sir Edward bought this," or "Sir Edward preferred that," but it was always as "Sir Edward," never as "my husband"—that fond name which many widows always use, as if tenaciously anxious that death itself should not loosen one link of the precious tie.

Lady de Bougainville retired to dress for dinner, and I had to do the same. Hurrying over my toilette, and eager to re-examine the house at every available minute, I came ignorantly into the only room where we had not penetrated—the dining-room—and there saw, lit up by the blazing fire, the only picture there—a large portrait in oils.

"Who is that?" I took courage presently to ask of the man-servant who was laying the table, with glittering plate and delicate glass, more beautiful than any I had ever seen.

"It's Sir Edward, miss,—my lady's husband."

"Oh, of course," I said, trying to look unconcerned, and speedily quitting the room, for I

was a little afraid of that most respectable footman.

But, in truth, I never was more astonished than at this discovery. First the portrait was in clerical robes ; and, though I ought to have known it, I certainly did not know that a "Sir" could be also a "Reverend." Then it was such a common face,—good-looking, perhaps, in so far as abundant whiskers, great eyes, rosy cheeks, and a large nose, constitute handsomeness ; but there was nothing in it,—nothing whatever ! Neither thought, feeling, nor intellect, were likely ever to have existed under those big bones, covered with comfortable flesh and blood. Perhaps this was partly the artist's fault. He must have been a commonplace artist, from the stiff formal attitude in which he had placed his sitter—at a table, with an open book before him, and a crimson curtain behind. But Titian himself would have struggled vainly to impart interest to that round forehead, long weak chin, and rabbit mouth, with its good-natured, self-complacent smile.

I contrasted the portrait mentally with the living face of Lady de Bougainville,—her sharply-cut, yet mobile features, her firm close lips, her brilliant eyes. Could it be possible that this man was her husband? Had I, with the imaginative faculty of youth, constructed a romance which never existed? Had her life been, to say the least, a great mistake—at any rate, so far as concerned her marriage? How *could* she marry a man like that! I know not whether I most pitied, or may Heaven forgive me my momentary harsh judgment, given with the rash reaction peculiar to young people—condemned her.

Yes, I was hard; to the living and to the dead likewise. The portrait may not have been like the original; I have seen many a good face so villainously reproduced by an inferior artist, that you would hardly recognise your best friend. But, granting that he was handsome—which from after and circumstantial evidence I am pretty sure of—still, Sir Edward de Bougainville could never have had either a very

clever or very pleasant face. Not even in his youth, when the portrait was painted. It was a presentation portrait, in a heavy gilt frame, which bore the motto, "From an admiring Congregation," of some church in Dublin.

Then, had Sir Edward been an Irishman? It was decidedly an Irish face—not of the broad and flat-nosed, but the dark and good-featured type. De Bougainville was not at all an Irish name; but I knew there had been a considerable influx of French families into Ireland after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. How I longed to ask questions! but it was impossible.

At dinner, my hostess sat with her back to the portrait; I, directly opposite to it, and her. The candelabra glimmered between us—how I love the delicate pure light of wax candles!—glimmered on her softly-tinted old face, set off by the white muslin of her widow's cap, and the rich lace at her throat and on her bosom; upon her shining black silk dress, and her numerous rings. As I have said, her appearance was essentially aristocratic, but she had come to that

time of life when only a noble soul will make it so : when the most beautiful woman in the world, if she have only beauty to recommend her, fades into commonplace plainness ; and neither birth nor breeding will supply the want of what includes and outshines them both—the lamp burning *inside* the lovely house ; and so making it lovely even to its latest moment of decay.

This was exactly what I saw in her, and did not see in Sir Edward de Bougainville. The portrait quite haunted me. I wondered how she could sit underneath it day after day ; whether she liked or disliked to look at it, or whether during long years she had grown so used to it that she scarcely saw it at all. And yet as we rose to retire, those big staring eyes of the dead man seemed to follow her out of the room, as if to inquire, “Have you forgotten me ?”

Had she ? Can a woman, after ever so sad a wedded life, ever so long a widowhood, quite forget the husband of her youth, the father of her children ? There are circumstances when she might do so—other circumstances when I

almost think she ought. Nevertheless, I doubt if she ever can. This, without any sentimental belief in never-dying love—for love can be killed outright; and when its life has fled, better that its corpse should be buried out of sight: let there be no ridiculous shams kept up, but let a silence complete as that of the grave fall—between even child and parent, husband and wife. Still, as to forgetting? Men may; I cannot tell; but we women *never* forget.

Lady de Bougainville took my arm—a mere kindness, as she required no support, and was much taller than I—and we went out of the dining-room through the hall, where, in spite of the lamp, the moonlight lay visibly on the scagliola pillars, clear and cold. I could not help shivering. She noticed it, and immediately gave orders that instead of the drawing-room we should go and sit in the cedar parlour.

“It will be warmer and more cheerful for you, Winifred; and besides, I like my cedar parlour; it reminds me of my friend, Miss Harriett Byron. You have read ‘Sir Charles Grandison?’ ”

I had, and burst into enthusiasm over the “man of men,” doubting if there are ever such men nowadays.

“No, nor ever were,” said, with a sharp ring in her voice, Lady de Bougainville.

Then, showing me the wainscotting of cedar-wood, she told me how it also had been discovered, like the tapestry and the oak carvings, when Brierley Hall was put under repair ; which had occupied a whole year and more after the house was bought.

“Why did you buy it if it was so dilapidated ?” I asked.

“Because we wanted something old, yet something that would make into a family seat —the root of a numerous race. And we required a large house ; there were so many of us then. Now——”

She stopped. Accustomed as she had grown to the past, with much of its pain deadened by the merciful anaesthesia of time and old age, still, talking to me, a stranger, seemed to revive it a little. As she stood by the fire, the light

shining on her rings—a heap of emeralds and diamonds, almost concealing the wedding-ring, now a mere thread of gold—I could see how she twisted her fingers together, and clasped and unclasped her hands; physical actions implying sharp mental pain.

But she said nothing, and after we had had our coffee—delicious French *café-au-lait*, served in the most exquisite Sèvres china—she took up a book, and giving me another, we both sat reading quietly, almost without speaking another syllable, until my bedtime.

When I went to bed—early, by her command—she touched both my cheeks, French fashion, with her lips. Many will laugh at the confession—but that kiss seemed to thrill me all through with a felicity as deep and intense as that of a young knight, who, having won his spurs, receives for the first time the benediction and salutation of his beloved.

When I entered my room, it was bright with firelight and the glow of scarlet curtains. I revelled in its novel luxuries, as if I had been

accustomed to them all my days. They gratified my taste, my imagination, my senses—shall I say my soul? Yes, a part of one's soul does take pleasure, and has a right to take pleasure, in material comfort and beauty. I had greatly enjoyed wandering over that handsome house, dining at the well-appointed table, spending the evening in the pretty cedar parlour. Now, when I retired into my own chamber, into the innermost chamber of my own heart, how fared it with me?

Let me tell the truth. I sat awhile wrapped in purely sensuous satisfaction. Then I thought of my poor father, sitting in his cold study; having none of these luxuries, nor caring for them. An ugly house to him was the same as a pretty one: a blank street wall as a lovely view. Pleasant things were altogether wasted upon him; nay, he despised them, and would have despised me, I knew, had he seen in me any tendency—alas! an hereditary tendency—to luxury and selfish extravagance. Yet I had it, or I feared so sometimes; but perhaps the

very fear enabled me to keep it under wholesome control. It sometimes is so. The most strictly truthful person I ever knew, said to me once, "I believe I was born a liar, till I found out that lying ran in our blood, and that cured me."

My cure came in a different way, but not immediately. I well recall the bitterness with which, this night, I sat comparing my bedroom in Brierley Hall with the wretched attic which I tried so hard to make tolerably pretty, and could not. Was I destined always to live thus—struggling vainly against natural tastes, which Providence did not choose to gratify? Were they therefore wrong? Was it any blame to Lady de Bougainville that in spite of her saying, if I were as rich as she, "she should be very sorry for me," she should be at this minute ascending her beautiful staircase to her stately bedroom—I heard her shut its door—and laying down her lovely hair upon those laced pillows, as she must have done all her life? She had doubtless been born to all these pleasant neces-

Lady de Bougainville must have seen this, for, instead of sending me at once to bed, she sat down beside me, and took my hand.

"And so you would like to earn a fortune as I earned mine, and to enjoy it as I enjoy mine? Poor child!" She sat thoughtful a little, then suddenly said: "I do not like even a child to deceive herself. Shall I tell you a story?"

I expected it would have been the story of her life; but no, it was only a little fable of a shepherd who, elevated from his sheepfolds to be vizier to a caliph, was accused of appropriating his master's treasures, and hiding them in a wooden box which he always kept beside him. At last, spurred on by the vizier's enemies, the caliph insisted on seeing the contents of the box, and came with all his courtiers to witness its opening. It contained only a ragged woollen coat, shepherd's sandals, and a crook.

"And now, Winifred, would you like to play the caliph and the envious courtiers? Will you come and look at my hidden treasure?"

She led the way into her bed-room, where the firelight shone on masses of damask drapery, and mirrors which at each step reproduced our figures. How noble and stately hers was, even in the grey dressing-gown! At the foot of the bed, quite hidden by a velvet cushion which covered it, lay one of those old-fashioned hair-trunks which were in use about half a century ago. She unlocked it, and therein was—what think you?

A gown of white dimity, or what had been white, but was now yellow with lying by, three little girls' frocks, of commonest lilac print, two pairs of boys' shoes, very much worn, and, patched all over with the utmost neatness, a pair of threadbare boy's trousers.

This was all. I looked into the box, as I might have looked into a coffin, but I said not a word; her face warned me I had better not. Silently she locked up the trunk again; then, with a tender carefulness, as if she were wrapping up a baby, laid the cushions over it, and, taking my hand, led me back to my room.

“Now go to bed, and to sleep, Winifred; but
cease dreaming about a fortune, and envy me
mine no more.”

THE STORY.

CHAPTER I.

I AM going back in my history of Lady de Bougainville nearly fifty years.

But before taking it up at that far-away period, so long before I knew her, and continuing it down to the time when I did know her—where I have just now let it drop—let me say a few words.

To give the actual full details of any human life is simply impossible. History cannot do it, nor biography, nor yet autobiography ; for, even if we wished, we could not tell the exact truth about ourselves. Paradoxical as it may sound, I have often thought that the nearest approximation to absolute truth is fiction ; because the

novelist presents, not so much literal facts, which can be twisted and distorted to almost any shape, as the one underlying verity of human nature. Thus, Lady de Bougainville's story, as I have gradually gathered it from herself and others, afterwards putting together all the data which came into my hands, is given by me probably as near reality as any one not gifted with clairvoyance could give it. I believe I have put "the facts of the case" with as much veracity as most historians. Nor am I bolder in discriminating motives and judging actions than many historians—nay, than we all often assume to be, just as if we were omnipresent and omniscient, towards our poor fellow-worms. But still, any one with common sense and common perception, studying human nature, must see that certain effects must follow certain causes, and produce certain final results, as sure as that the daylight follows the sun. Therefore, when we writers make a story, and our readers speculate about it, and "wonder how it will end," we rather smile at them. We know that,

if it is true to human life, it can end but in one way,—subject to various modifications, but still only in one way. Granting such and such premises, the result must follow, inexorable as fate.

And so, in course of years, I arrived at Lady de Bougainville's history as accurately as if she herself had written it down : nay, more so, for upon various points of it her tongue was, and ever would have been, firmly sealed, while upon other points circumstances and her own peculiar character made her incompetent to form a judgment. But it was easy enough to form my own, less from what she related than by what she unwittingly betrayed, still more by what I learned,—though not till after she was gone,—by the one only person who had known her in her youth, the old Irishwoman, Bridget Halloran, who then lived a peaceful life of busy idleness in Lady de Bougainville's house, and afterwards ended her days as an honoured inmate in mine.

Bridget, as soon as she knew me, and grew fond of me, had no reserves ; but her mistress

had many. Never once did she sit down to relate to me her "history,"—people do not do that in real life; and yet she was for ever letting fall facts and incidents which, put together, made a complete and continuous autobiography. Her mind, ever dwelling on the past, and indifferent to, or oblivious of, the present, had acquired a vividness and minuteness of recollection that was quite remarkable. I never questioned her: that was impossible. At the slightest indication of impertinent curiosity she would draw in her horns, or retire at once into her shell like any hermit crab, and it was difficult to lure her out again. But generally, by simply listening while she talked, and putting this and that together by the light of what I knew of her character, I arrived at a very fair estimate of the total facts, and the motives which produced them.

Upon these foundations I have built my story. It is no truer and no falser than our reproductions of human nature, in history, biography, and romance, usually are, and as such I leav-

it. The relation harms no one. And it will be something if I can snatch out of the common oblivion of women's lives—I mean women who die the last of their race, “and leave the world no pattern”—the strange, chequered life of my dear Lady de Bougainville.

And so to begin :—

MORE than half a century ago, the Rev. Edward Scanlan came to be curate of the parish in the small West of England town of Ditchley St. Mary's, commonly called Ditchley only.

At that time the Establishment—especially as it existed in the provinces—was in a very different condition from what it is at present. “Orthodoxy” meant each clergyman doing that which was right in his own eyes, as to rubric, doctrine, or clerical government ; that is, within certain limits of sleepy decorum, and settled common usage. Beyond the pale of the Church there existed a vague dread of the Pope on one side, and Dissent on the other ; and people had

a general consciousness that the Establishment alone was really “respectable” to belong to ; but within its boundary all went smoothly enough. Low Church, High Church, Broad Church, were terms unknown. There was not sufficient earnestness to create schism. One only section of new thinkers had risen up, originating with young Mr. Simeon of Cambridge, who either called themselves or were called, “Evangelicals,” and spoke much about “the gospel,” which the more ardent of them fancied that they and they alone had received, and were commissioned to preach. This made them a little obnoxious to their old-fashioned brethren ; but still they were undoubtedly a set of very earnest, sincere, and hard-working clergymen, whose influence in the English, and more particularly the Irish Church, was beginning to be clearly felt ; only it did not extend to such remote parishes as that of Ditchley.

The Ditchley rector was a clergyman of the old school entirely : when still a young man he was presented to the living through family in-

fluence, and had fulfilled his duties decently, if rather grudgingly, his natural bias being in a contrary direction, and his natural disposition being from this or some other reason correspondingly soured. He was a man of education and taste ; had travelled much on the Continent when he was only a younger brother, and before it was expected that he would have dropped in, as he did, late in life, for the whole accumulation of the family property ;—alas ! rather too late—for by that time Henry Oldham was a confirmed old bachelor.

Since then he had crept on peacefully to septuagenarianism, the last of his race. He never went to live at Oldham Court, but let it to strangers, and kept on his modest establishment at the Rectory, which was a very pretty place, having once been a monastery, with a beautiful garden, in which he greatly delighted, and over which he was said to spend extravagant sums. Otherwise he lived carefully, some thought penuriously, but he was charitable enough to the poor of his parish ; and he read prayers now and

then, and preached a sermon, fifteen minutes long, regularly once a month ; which comprised for him the whole duty of a clergyman.

I have seen Mr. Oldham's portrait, engraved, after his death, by the wish of his parishioners. represented sitting at his library-table, in gown and bands. His sermon lies before him, and he has the open Bible under his right hand, as in the portrait of the Reverend Sir Edward de Bougainville. But he is very unlike that admired individual, being a little spare old man, with a funny scratch wig, and a keen, caustic, though not unkindly expression ; more like a lawyer than a clergyman, and more like a country gentleman than either.

Except this monthly sermon, and his necessary charities, which were no burthen to him, Mr. Oldham being, as has been said, a very wealthy man, though nobody knew the precise amount of his wealth,—the rector left all his parish responsibilities to his curate, whom he had picked up, during one of his rare absences from home, soon after his former as-

sistant in the duty—a college chum nearly as old as himself—died.

How such a strong contrast as the Reverend Edward Scanlan ever succeeded the Reverend Thomas Heavisides was a standing wonder to Ditchley. He was young, handsome, and an Irishman, belonging to that section of the Irish Church which coincided with the English “Evangelicals,” except that in Ireland they added politics to religion, and were outrageously and vehemently “Orange”—a term of which, mercifully, the present generation has almost forgotten the meaning.

Mr. Scanlan had been, in his native country, as Ditchley soon discovered—for he had no hesitation in betraying the fact—a popular preacher. Indeed, his principal piece of furniture in his temporary lodgings was his own portrait in that character, presented to him just before he left Dublin—and he maintained the credit of a popular preacher still. On his very first Sunday, he took the parish by storm. He literally “roused” the congregation, who were accus-

omed to do nothing but sleep during the sermon. But no one could sleep during that of the new curate. He preached extempore, which of itself was a startling novelty, alarming the old people a little, but delighting the young ones. Then his delivery was so loud and energetic ; he beat the pulpit cushion so impressively with his white ringed hand ; and his sentences rolled off with such brilliant fluency. He never paused a moment for a word—ideas nobody asked for ; and his mellifluous Irish accent sounded so original, so charming. His looks too—his abundance of black hair and large blue-black eyes—Irish eyes—which he knew how to make the very most of. Though he was short of stature and rather stump in figure compared to the well-grown young Saxons about Ditchley, still all the Ditchley ladies at once pronounced him “ exceedingly handsome,” and disseminated that opinion accordingly.

On the top of it—perhaps consequent upon it—came, after a Sunday or two, the further opinion, “exceedingly clever.” Certainly Mr.

Scanlan's sermons were very unlike anything ever before heard in Ditchley. He seized upon sacred subjects in a dashing, familiar way—handled them with easy composure; illustrated them with all sorts of poetical similes, taken from everything in heaven and earth; smothered them up with flowers of imagery—so that the original thought, if there was any at all, became completely hidden in its multiplicity of adornments.

Sometimes, in his extreme volubility of speech, Mr. Scanlan used illustrations whose familiarity almost approached the ludicrous, thereby slightly scandalising the sober people of Ditchley. But they soon forgave him; when a man talks so much and so fast, he must make slips sometimes—and he was so pleasant in his manner, so meekly subservient to criticism, or so calmly indifferent to it, that it soon died away; more especially as the rector himself had the good taste and good feeling never to join in anything that was said either for or against his curate. In which example he was

followed by the better families of the place—staunch old Tories, with whom a clergyman was a clergyman, and not amenable to the laws which regulate common men. They declared that whoever Mr. Oldham chose was sure to be the right person, and were perfectly satisfied.

Mr. Oldham was satisfied too—or at least appeared so. He always showed Mr. Scanlan every possible politeness, and professed himself perfectly contented with him,—as he was with most things that saved himself from trouble. He had had in his youth a hard, in his age an easy life; and if there was one thing he disliked more than another, it was taking trouble. The Irish exuberance of Mr. Scanlan filled up all gaps, socially as well as clerically, and lifted the whole weight of the parish from the old man's shoulders. So, without any foolish jealousy, Mr. Oldham allowed his charming young curate to carry all before him; and moreover gave him a salary, which, it was whispered, was far more than Mr. Heavisides

had ever received ; nay, more than was given to any curate in the neighbourhood. But then Mr. Scanlan was so very superior a preacher, and (alas ! for the Ditchley young ladies when they found it out) he was already a married man.

This last fact, when it leaked out, which it did not for a week or two, was, it must be owned, a considerable blow. The value of the new curate decreased at once. But Ditchley was too dull a place, and the young Irishman too great a novelty, for the reaction to be very serious.

So, after a few cynical remarks of the sour grape pattern, as to how very early and imprudently he must have married—the Irish always did—how difficult he would find it to keep a wife and family on a curate's income, and how very inferior a person the lady would probably be—Mr. Scanlan's star again rose, and he was generally accepted by the little community.

It is a mistake to suppose that the Irish are unappreciated in England—especially provincial

England. Often the slow, bovine, solid Briton is greatly taken by the lively-tempered, easy, mercurial Celt, who both supplies a want, and creates an excitement. A gentlemanly, clever, and attractive young Hibernian will drop suddenly down upon an old-fashioned English country-town, amuse the men, captivate the women, and end by putting his bridle on the neck of ever so many of these mild stolid agricultural animals—leading them by the nose completely, for a little while—as did the gentleman who had just made his appearance in Ditchley. For weeks nothing was talked of but the Reverend Edward Scanlan—his brilliant preaching—his good looks, his agreeable manners. Every girl in the town would have been in love with him but for that uncomfortable impediment, his wife. Great was the speculation concerning her—what kind of person she was likely to be. Imagination had full time to develop itself: for the curate occupied his lodgings alone for three months, during which time—as he confidentially, and not without much anxious and husband-

like feeling, told the matrons of the place—Mrs. Scanlan was awaiting at his mother's house in Dublin the birth of their second child.

Then, he had a mother, and she had a house ; —two facts which, in the paucity of information concerning him, were eagerly seized upon, and discussed exhaustively. Indeed, these conjugal confessions seemed to open to the young man all the maternal arms in Ditchley—Ditchley town, that is. The county families still hung back a little, pausing till they could discover something certain about Mr. Scanlan's antecedents.

This was not easy. Fifty years ago London itself was very far off from the West of England, and Ireland seemed a *terra incognita* as distant as the antipodes. Nor, except letting fall in his conversation a good many titled names, which were recognized as belonging to the religious aristocracy of the period, did Mr. Scanlan say much about his family or connexions. He was apparently that odd mixture of candour and secretiveness which is peculiarly Celtic—

Highland and Irish. While voluble enough concerning himself personally, of his wife, his parents, and his relatives generally—who could not have been numerous, as he was an only child—he said remarkably little.

It is a curious fact, and a contradiction to certain amusing legal fictions concerning the conjugal estate—that whatever a man may be, and however great a personage theoretically, practically his social status is decided by his wife. Not so much by *her* social status or origin, as by the sort of woman she is in herself. King Cophetua may woo the beggar-maid, and if she has a queenly nature she will make an excellent queen; but if he chooses a beggar in royal robes, they will soon drop off, and the ugly mendicant appear;—then King Cophetua may turn beggar, but she will never make a queen.

And so, in every rank of life, unless a man chooses a woman who is capable of keeping up at home the dignity which he labours for in the world, he will soon find his own progress in life

sorely hampered and impeded, his usefulness narrowed, his honours thrown away.

Mr. Scanlan was no doubt a very charming man—quite the gentleman, everybody said; and his tastes and habits were those of a gentleman,—at least of a person who has been well off all his life. Indeed, he everywhere gave the impression of having been brought up in great luxury as a child, with ponies to ride, unlimited shooting and fishing, &c.—the sort of life befitting a squire's son; on the strength of which, though a clergyman, he became hand in glove with all the rollicking squires' sons round about.

Ditchley puzzled itself a little concerning his name. Scanlan did not sound very aristocratic, but then English ears never appreciate Irish patronymics. The only time that anyone in this neighbourhood had ever seen it—(the fact was breathed about tenderly, and never reached the curate)—was upon a stray porter bottle—"Scanlan and Co.'s Dublin stout"—but that might have been a mere coincidence; no doubt there

were many Scanlans all over Ireland. And even if it were not so—if Mr. Scanlan did really belong to the “stout” family—what harm was it? Who had not heard of illustrious brewers? Whitbread in England, Guinness in Ireland,—were they not names high in honour, especially among the religious world of the day—the Evangelical set—which, however, the old-fashioned, easy-going church people might differ from it, had undoubtedly begun to work a great revolution in the Establishment?

Mr. Scanlan belonged to it, and evidently glorified himself much in the fact. It was such an exceedingly respectable section of the community; there were so many titled and wealthy names connected with it; even a poor curate might gather from his alliance therewith a secondary honour. Nevertheless, the county society, which was very select, and not easily approachable, paused in its judgment upon the Reverend Edward Scanlan, until it had seen his wife. Then there was no longer any doubt concerning him.

I should think not! I could imagine how she looked the first time she appeared in public, which was at church, for she arrived at Ditchley on a Saturday—arrived alone with her two little babies—both babies, for one was just eighteen months the elder of the other—and their nurse, a thorough Irishwoman, very young, very untidy, very faithful, and very ugly. Well could I picture her as she walked up the church aisle,—though perhaps her noble kind of beauty would at first be hardly perceptible to these good Ditchley people, accustomed to fair Saxon complexions, plump figures, and cheeks rosy and round, whereas hers were pale and thin, and her eyes dark, with heavy circles underneath them. Besides, she was very tall; and slender, almost to tenuity; and her early maternity, combined with other cares, had taken from her the first fresh bloom of youth. At nineteen she looked rather older than her husband, though he was her senior by some years. “What a pity!” Ditchley said, in its comments upon her that Sunday; “why will Irishwomen marry

so young?"—until they found out she was not an Irishwoman at all.

What she was, or where she came from, they had at first no means of guessing. She spoke English perfectly. Nevertheless, as the ladies who called upon her during the ensuing week detected, she had certainly some sort of foreign accent; but whether French, German, or Spanish, the untravelled natives of Ditchley were quite unable to discover. And even the boldest and most inquisitive of them found—I can well believe it!—a certain difficulty in putting intrusive questions, or indeed questions of any kind, to Mrs. Scanlan. They talked about her babies, of whom she seemed irrationally proud; about her husband, to whose praises she listened with a sweet, calm, appreciative smile; and then they went away, having found out about her just as much as they knew the week before—viz., that she was Mrs. Scanlan.

Nevertheless, she burst upon Ditchley like a revelation,—this beautiful, well-bred young woman, who, though only the curate's wife,

living in very common furnished lodgings, seemed fully the equal of every lady who called upon her. Yet she made nobody uncomfortable. Those who came to patronize forgot to do it, that was all ; while the poorer and humbler ones, who, from her looks at church had been at first a little afraid of her—doubting she would be “stand-offish” and disagreeable—found her so pleasant, that they were soon quite at their ease, and went away to trumpet her praises far and near.

While she—how did she receive this praise, blame, or criticism ? Nobody could find out. She had all the simplicity and naturalness of one who takes no trouble to assert a position which she has had all her life ; is quite indifferent to outside shows of wealth or consequence, possessing that within which is independent of either ; easily accessible to all comers ; considering neither “What do other people think of you ?” or “I wonder what you are now thinking of me ?” but welcoming each and all with the calm, gentle graciousness of a lady who has

been, to use the current phrase, “thoroughly accustomed to good society.”

Such was the wife whom, much to their surprise after all—for in none of their speculations had they quite reckoned upon such a woman—the new curate introduced to the parish of Ditchley.

She settled his status there, at once and permanently. Nay, she did more, for, with her dignified candour, she explained at once the facts which he had hitherto kept concealed; not upon her neighbours’ first visit, but as soon as she grew at all into friendliness with them, even expressing some surprise that neither Mr. Scanlan nor Mr. Oldham—who treated her with great respect, and even had a dinner-party at the Rectory in her honour—should have made public the very simple facts of the Scanlan family history. Her Edward’s father was a wealthy Dublin brewer—the identical “Scanlan & Co.”—who had brought his son up to the Church, and was just on the point of buying him a living, when a sudden collapse in trade

came, the firm failed, the old man died penniless, leaving his old wife with only her small income to live upon, while the son was driven to maintain himself as best he could. Though he was a popular preacher, and very much sought after, still admiration brought no pounds, shillings, and pence ;—his fine friends slipped from him—no hope of preferment offered itself in Ireland. At which conjuncture he met Mr. Oldham, made friends with him, and accepted a fat curacy in the land of the Saxons.

This was the whole—a very plain statement, involving no mystery of any kind. Nor concerning herself was there aught to disguise. When her peculiar accent, and certain foreign ways she had, excited a few harmless wonderings, Mrs. Scanlan satisfied them all in the briefest but most unhesitating way, telling how she was of French extraction, her parents being both of an old Huguenot family, belonging to the *ancienne noblesse*. This latter fact she did not exactly state, until her visitors noticed a coronet on an old pocket-handkerchief, and then

she answered, quite composedly, that her late father, a teacher in Dublin, and very poor, was the Vicomte de Bougainville.

Here at once I give the clue to any small secret which may hitherto have thrown dust in the reader's eyes, but I shall attempt this no more. It must be quite clear to all persons of common penetration who was the lady I am describing.

Mademoiselle Josephine de Bougainville was the only child of her parents, who had met and married late in life, both being poor *émigrés* belonging to the same family, driven from France by the first Revolution. The mother was already dead when Josephine was given, at the early age of sixteen, to Edward Scanlan. I think, in spite of many presumptions to the contrary, that undoubtedly she married him from love, as he her. Perhaps, considering her extreme youth and her French bringing up, it was not exactly the right sort of love—not the love which we like to see our English daughters marry with, quite independent of the

desire of parents or friends, trusting to no influence but that of their own honest hearts ; but still it was love, and Edward Scanlan, a good-looking, ardent, impulsive young fellow, was just the sort of lover that would be attractive to sweet sixteen. I believe he fell in love with her at church, violently and desperately ; and his parents, who never said him nay in anything, and who had the shrewdness to see that her beauty and her good birth formed an excellent balance to the Scanlan money—nay, would be rather an advantage to the same—instead of resisting, encouraged the marriage. They applied to M. de Bougainville for his daughter's hand, and the poor old Vicomte, starving in his garret, was glad enough to bestow it—to see his child safe settled in a home of her own, and die.

He might have used some persuasion ; she might have thought, French fashion, that it was right to marry whomsoever her father wished, and so bent her will cheerfully to his. But I am sure she did not marry against her will, from

the simple fact that, to a nature like hers, a marriage without love, or for anything except love, would have been, at any age, altogether impossible. Besides, I have stronger evidence still. Once, in discussing, with regard to myself, this momentous question, Lady de Bougainville said to me, very solemnly—so solemnly that I never forgot her words :

“Remember, Winifred, love alone is not sufficient in marriage. But, wanting love, nothing else suffices—no outward suitability, no tie of gratitude or duty. All break like threads before the wrench of the ever-grinding wheel of daily cares. I had a difficult married life, my dear, but it would have been ten times more so if, when I married, I had not loved my husband.”

I find that, instead of telling a consecutive story, I am mixing up confusedly the near and the far away. But it is nearly impossible to avoid this. Many things, obviously, I have to guess at. Given the two ends of a fact, I must imagine the middle—but I shall imagine as lit-

tle as ever I can. And I have two clues to guide me through the labyrinth—clues which have never failed through all those years.

Every Saturday night, when her children were in bed, her week's duties done, and her husband arranging his sermon, a task he always put off till the last minute, sitting up late to do it—and she never went to bed until he was gone, and she could shut up the house herself—this quiet hour Mrs. Scanlan always devoted to writing a journal. It was in French, not English; and very brief: a record of facts, not feelings; events, not moralizings: but it was kept with great precisionness and accuracy. And, being in French, was private; since, strange to say, her husband had never taken the trouble to learn the language.

Secondly, Lady de Bougainville had one curious superstition: she disliked burning even the smallest scrap of paper. Every letter she had ever received, she kept arranged in order, and ticketed with its date of receipt, and the writer's name. Thus, had she been a celebrated

personage, cursed with a biographer, the said biographer would have had no trouble at all in arranging his data, and gathering out of them every possible evidence,—except perhaps the truth, which lies deeper than any external facts. Many a time I laughed at her for this peculiarity of hers; many a time I declared that were I a notable person, I would take care to give those who came after me as much trouble as possible: instituting such periodical inclemencies as would leave the chronicler of my life with no data to traffic upon, but keep him in a state of wholesome bewilderment concerning me.

At which Lady de Bougainville only smiled, saying,

“ What does it matter? Why need you care?”

It may be so. As we decline towards our end, the projected glory and peace of the life to come may throw into dimness all this present life: we may become indifferent to all that has happened to us, and all that people may say

and think of us after we are gone. She did, I know. And I might feel the same myself, if I had no children.

These two children of hers, the little girl and boy, were enough of themselves to make life begin brightly for young Mrs. Scanlan, even in the dull town of Ditchley. And it was the bright time of year, when Ditchley itself caught the reflected glow of the lovely country around it—rich, West of England country ; wide, green, heaving pasture-lands, and lanes full of spring-flowers. The first time her little César came home with his chubby hands holding, or rather dropping, a mass of broken blue hyacinths, his mother snatched him in her arms, and smothered him with kisses. She felt as if her own childhood were come over again in that of her children.

Besides, the sudden collapse of fortune, which had brought so many changes, brought one blessing, which was a very great one to Josephine Scanlan. Hitherto the young couple had never had a separate home. The old couple, consider-

ing—perhaps not unwisely—that the wife was so young, and the husband so thoughtless, and that they themselves had no other children, brought them home to live with them in their grand house ; which combined establishment had lasted until the crash came.

It could scarcely have been a life altogether to Josephine's taste ; though I believe her father and mother-in-law were very worthy people—quite uneducated, having “made themselves,” but gentle, kind, and good. If ever she did speak of them, it was always with tenderness. Still, to the poor *émigré*'s daughter, brought up in all the traditions of “blue blood ;” taught to take as her standard of moral excellence the chivalry which holds honour as the highest good, and, socially, to follow that perfect simplicity which indicates the truest refinement—to such an one there must always have been something jarring in the rude, lavish luxury of these *nouveaux riches*, who, being able to get anything through their money, naturally concluded that money was everything. Though

her fetters were golden, still, fetters they were : and though she must have worn them with a smiling, girlish grace,—she was so much of a child, in years and in character—yet I have no doubt she felt them sometimes. When, all in a day, they dropped off like spiders' webs, I am afraid young Mrs. Scanlan was not nearly so unhappy as she ought to have been ; nay, was conscious of a certain sense of relief and exhilaration of spirits. It was like passing out of a hot-house into the free, pure air outside ; and, though chilling at first, the change was wonderfully strengthening and refreshing.

The very first shock of it had nerved the shy, quiet girl into a bright, brave, active woman, ready to do all that was required of her, and more ; complaining of nothing, and afraid of nothing. Calmly she had lived on with her mother-in-law, amidst the mockeries of departed wealth, till the house and furniture at Merrion Square could be sold ; as calmly, in a little lodging at Kingstown, had she waited the birth of her second child ; and then, with equal fearless-

ness, had travelled from Ireland with the children and Bridget, alone and unprotected, though it was the first time in her life she had ever done such a thing. But she did it thankfully and happily; and she was happy and thankful now.

True, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Scanlan felt at first the full weight of their changed fortunes. The grand sweep of everything had not been so complete—or else it had been managed so ingeniously, as wide-awake people can manage these little affairs—as to leave them out of the wreck a good many personal luxuries. By the time the picturesque little cottage—which, being on the Rector's land, he had put into good repair, and recommended as a suitable habitation for his curate—was ready, there arrived by sea, from Dublin, quite enough of furniture—the remnant of old splendours—to make it very comfortable; nay, almost every lady, in paying the first call upon Mrs. Scanlan, at Wren's Nest, said admiringly,

“What a pretty home you have got!”

Then when Mrs. Scanlan returned the visits, and, the term of mourning for her parents-in-law having expired, accepted a few invitations round about, she did so in clothes which, if a little unfashionable in Dublin, were regarded as quite modern at Ditchley ; garments so handsome, so well arranged, and so gracefully put on, that some of his confidential matron friends said to Mr. Scanlan,

“ How charmingly your wife dresses ! Any one could see she was a Frenchwoman by the perfection of her toilette.”

At which Mr. Scanlan was, of course, excessively delighted ; and admired his beautiful wife more than ever, because other people admired her so much.

He, too, was exceedingly “ jolly ”—only that word had not then got engrafted in the English language—in spite of his loss of fortune. The result of it did not as yet affect him personally ; none of his comforts were curtailed to any great extent. “ Roughing it ” in lodgings, with every good house in the parish open

to him whenever he chose to avail himself of the hospitality, had been not such a very hard thing. Nor was “love in a cottage,” in summer-time—with roses and jessamines clustering about the door, and everybody who entered it praising the taste and skill of his wife, within and without the house, and saying how they envied such a scene of rural felicity—by any means an unpleasant thing.

In truth, the curate sometimes scarcely believed he was a poor man at all, or in anywise different from the Edward Scanlan, with whom everything had gone so smoothly since his cradle; for his parents, having married late in life, had their struggle over before he was born. He still dressed with his accustomed taste—a little florid, perhaps, but not bad taste; he had always money in his pocket, which he could spend or give away, and he was equally fond of doing both. He had not, naturally, the slightest sense of the individual or relative value of either sovereigns or shillings, no more than if they had been dead leaves. This peculiarity had mat-

tered little once, when he was a rich young fellow ; now, when it did matter, it was difficult to conquer.

His mother had said to Josephine on parting —almost the last thing she did say, for the old woman died within the year—

“Take care of poor Edward, and look after the money yourself, my dear, or it’ll burn a hole in his pockets—it always did.”

And Josephine had laughed at the phrase with an almost childish amusement, and total ignorance of what it meant and implied. She understood it too well afterwards.

But not now. Not in the least during that first sunshiny summer, which made Ditchley so pleasant and dear to her that the charm lasted through many and many a sunless summer and dreary winter. Her husband she had all to herself, for the first time ;—he was so fond of her—so kind to her ; she went about with him more than she had ever been able to do since her marriage ; taking rambles to explore the country, paying amusing first visits together, to

investigate and criticise the Ditchley society ; receiving as much attention as if they were a new married couple ; and even as to themselves, having, as it were, their honeymoon over again, only a great deal more gay and more comfortable. It was indeed a very happy life for Mr. and Mrs. Scanlan.

As for the babies, they were in an earthly paradise. Wren's Nest was built among the furze bushes of a high common, as a wren's nest should be ; and the breezes that swept over were so fresh and pure, that the two little delicate faces soon began to grow brown with health—César's especially. The infant, Adrienne, had always been a small fragile thing. But César grew daily into a real boy, big, hearty, and strong ; and Bridget showed him off wherever she went as one of the finest children of the neighbourhood.

Thus time went on, marching upon flowers ; still he did march, steadily, remorselessly. But it was not till the fall of the year, when a long succession of wet days and weeks made

Wren's Nest look,—as a wren's nest might be expected to look in wintry weather—that the Scalans woke up to the recollection that they were actually “poor” people.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT are “poor” people? such as I have just stated the curate of Ditchley and his wife to be?

Few questions can be more difficult to answer. “Poor” is an adjective of variable value. I compassionate my next neighbour as a “poor” woman, because she lives in a small tumble-down cottage at the end of my garden, and has nine children and a sick husband. While my next neighbour but one, who drives about in her carriage and pair, no doubt compensates me, because in all weathers I have to go on foot. Often when she sweeps past me, trudging along our muddy lanes, and we bow and smile, I can detect a lurking something, half pity—half—no, she is too kind for scorn!—

in her face, which exceedingly amuses me. For I know that if her carriage meets the little chaise and ponies, driven by the lovely Countess whose seat is four miles off, the said Countess will be greatly envied by my wealthy neighbour, whose husband has only one handsome house to live in, while the Earl has six.

Thus, you see, “poor” is a mere adjective of comparison.

But when I call the Scanlans “poor,” it was because their income was not equal to their almost inevitable expenditure. Theirs was the sharpest form of poverty, which dare not show itself as such; which has, or thinks it has, a certain position to keep up, and, therefore, must continually sacrifice inside comforts to outside shows. How far this is necessary or right remains an open question—I have my opinion on the subject. But one thing is certain, that a curate, obliged to appear as a gentleman, and mix freely in other gentlemen’s society—to say nothing of his having, unfortunately, the tastes and necessities of a gentleman—is in a much

harder position than any artisan, clerk, or small shopkeeper, who has the same number of pounds a year to live upon. Especially when both have the same ever-increasing family,—only a rather different sort of family,—to bring up upon it.

When Mr. Scanlan's stock of ready-money—that “running account” in the Ditchley bank, which he had thought so inexhaustible, but which ran away as fast as a centipede before the year was out—when this sum was nearly at an end, the young husband opened his eyes wide with a kind of angry astonishment. His first thought was, that his wife had been spending money a great deal too fast. This was possible, seeing she was still but a novice in house-keeping, and besides she really did not know how much she had to keep house upon. For her husband, proud of his novel dignity as master of a family, had desired her to “leave everything to him—just ask him for what she wanted and he would give it to her: a man should always be left to manage his own affairs.” And Josephine, dutifully believing this, had smiled at

the recollection of her mother-in-law's caution, thinking how much better a wife knew her husband than his own parents ever did,—and cheerfully assented. Consequently, she made not a single inquiry as to how their money stood, until there was no money left to inquire after.

This happened on a certain damp November day—she long remembered the sort of day it was, and the minutiae of all that happened on it; for it was the first slight lifting up of that golden haze of happiness—the first opening of her eyes unto the cold, cheerless land that she was entering; the land where girlish dreams and ideal fancies are not, and all the pleasures that exist therein, if existing at all, must be taken after a different fashion, and enjoyed in a different sort of way.

Mr. Scanlan had gone into Ditchley in the forenoon, and his wife had been busy making all sorts of domestic arrangements for a change that would rather increase than diminish the family expenditure, and holding a long consultation with her one servant as to a little plan

she had, which would lighten both their hands, and indeed, seemed, with present prospects, almost a necessity.

For, hard-working woman as Bridget was—and when there is found an industrious, conscientious, tidy Irishwoman, how she will work! with all her heart in it too—still Wren's Nest in winter and Wren's Nest in summer were two very different abodes. You cannot keep a little cottage as warm as a good-sized house, or as neat either, especially when the said little cottage has two little people in it, just of the age when rich parents find it convenient to exile their children to safe nurseries at the top of the house, to be “out of the way.” Wren's Nest, quite large enough when César and Adrienne were out on the common from morning till night—became small when the poor little things had to be shut up in it all day long. Their voices—not always sweet—sometimes rang through it in a manner that even their mother found rather trying. As to their father—but Mrs. Scanlan had already begun to guess at

one fact, which all young married women have to discover—that the more little children are kept out of their father's way the better for all parties.

Moreover, Josephine's husband still enjoyed his wife's company far too well not to grumble a little when she stinted him of it for the sake of her babies. He excessively disliked the idea of her becoming "a family woman," as he called it, swallowed up in domestic cares. Why not leave all that to the servants? He still said "servants," forgetting that there was now but one. Often to please him—it was so sweet to please him always!—Mrs. Scanlan would resign many a necessary duty, or arrange her duties so that she could sit with him alone in the parlour, listening while he talked or read—listening with one ear while the other was kept open to the sounds in the kitchen, where Bridget might be faintly heard, going about her work, and crooning the while some Irish ditty; keeping baby on one arm while she did as much as she could of the household work with the other.

Poor Bridget! with all her good will, of course, under such circumstances, things were not done as well as they ought to have been, nor were the children taken such care of as their anxious mother thought right. When there was a third child impending, some additional household help became indispensable, and it was on this subject that she and Bridget were laying their heads together—very different heads, certainly, though the two young women—mistress and maid—were nearly the same age.

Let me pause for a moment to draw Bridget Halloran's portrait—lovingly, for she was a great friend of mine.

She was very ugly, almost the ugliest woman I ever knew, and she must have been just the same in youth as in age, probably uglier, for time might by then have ironed out some of the small-pox seams which contributed not a little to the general disfigurement of her features. True, she never could have had much features to boast of, hers being the commonest type of

Irish faces, flat, broad, round as an apple-dumpling, with a complexion of the dumpling hue and soddeness. There was a small dough-pinch for the nose, a wide slit for the mouth, two, beady, black-currants of eyes—and you had Bridget Halloran's face complete. Her figure was short and sturdy, capable of infinite exertion and endurance; but as for grace and beauty, not even in her teens did it possess one single line. Her sole charm was that peculiarly Hibernian one—a great mass of very fine blue-black hair, which she hid under a cap, and nobody ever saw it.

But nature, which had been so niggardly to this poor woman in outward things, compensated for it by putting into her the brightest, bravest, truest, peasant nature—the nature of the Irish peasant, who, being blessed with a double share of both heart and brains, is capable alike of anything good and anything bad. Bridget, no doubt, had her own capacities for the latter, but they had remained undeveloped; while all the good in her had grown, month by month,

and day by day, ever since, at little César's birth, she came as nursemaid into the service of young Mrs. Scanlan.

To her mistress she attached herself at once with the passionate admiration that ugliness sometimes conceives for beauty, coarseness for grace and refinement. And, they being thrown much together, as mothers and nursemaids are, or ought to be, this admiration settled into the most faithful devotion that it is possible to human nature. At any time, I think, Bridget would composedly have gone to be hanged for the sake of her mistress; or rather, dying being a small thing to some people, I think she would have committed for her sake any crime that necessitated hanging. Which is still not saying much, as Bridget's sole consciousness of, and distinction between right and wrong was, whether or not Mrs. Scanlan considered it so.

But I have said enough to indicate what sort of person this Irish girl was, and explain why the other girl—still no more than a girl in years, though she was mistress and mother—held to-

wards her a rather closer relation than most ladies do with their servants nowadays. Partly, because Bridget was of Irish, and Mrs. Scanlan of French birth, and in both countries the idiosyncrasy of the people makes the tie between the server and the served a little different from what it is in England. Also, because the enormous gulf externally between Josephine Scanlan *née de Bougainville*, and Bridget Halloran, nobody's daughter (being taken from a foundling hospital), was crossed easier than many lesser distances, especially by that slender, firm, almost invisible but indestructible bond of a common nature—a nature wholly womanly. They understood one another, these two, almost without a word, on the simple ground of womanhood.

They were discussing anxiously the many, and to them momentous arrangements for the winter, or rather early spring—the new-comer being expected with the violets—but both servant and mistress had quite agreed on the necessity of a little twelve-year-old nursemaid,

and had even decided on the village school-girl whom they thought most suitable for the office.

And then Bridget, seeing her mistress look excessively tired with all her morning's exertions, took the children away into the kitchen, and made their mother lie down on the sofa underneath the window, where she could see the line of road across the common, and watch for Mr. Scanlan's return home.

She was tired, certainly; weary with the sacred weakness, mental and bodily, of impending maternity, but she was neither depressed nor dejected. It was not her nature to be either. God had given her not only strength, but great elasticity of temperament; she had been a very happy-hearted girl, as Josephine de Bougainville, and she was no less so as Josephine Scanlan. She had had a specially happy summer—the happiest, she thought, since she was married: her husband had been so much more her own, and she had enjoyed to the full the pleasure of being sole mistress in

her own house, though it was such a little one. I am afraid, if questioned, she would not for one moment have exchanged Wren's Nest for Merrion Square.

Nor—equal delusion!—would she have exchanged her own husband, the poor curate of Ditchley, for the richest man alive, or for all the riches he had possessed when she first knew him. She was very fond of him just as he was. She greatly enjoyed his having no valet, and requiring her to wait upon him hand and foot; it was pleasanter to her to walk across country, ever so far, clinging to his arm, than to be driven along in state, sitting beside him in the grand carriage. And beyond expression, sweet to her were the quiet evenings which had come since the winter set in, when no dinner-parties were possible, and after the children were gone to bed the young father and mother sat over the fire, as close together as lovers, and making love quite as foolishly sometimes.

“I suspect, after all, I was made to be a poor

man's wife," Josephine would sometimes say to herself, and think over all her duties in that character, and how she could best fulfil them, so that her Edward might not miss his lost riches the least in the world, seeing he had gained, as she had, so much better things.

She lay thinking of him on this wise, very tenderly, when she saw him come striding up to the garden-gate ; and her heart beat quicker, as it did still—foolish, fond creature!—at the sight of her young husband—her girlhood's love. She made an effort to rise and meet him with a bright face and open arms.

But his were closed, and his countenance was dark as night ; a very rare thing for the good-tempered, easy-minded Edward Scanlan.

"What is the matter, dear? Are you ill? Has anything happened?"

"Happened, indeed! I should think so! Do you mean to say you don't know—that you never guessed? Look there!"

He threw over to her one of those innocent-looking, terrible little books, called bank-books,

and went and flung himself down on the sofa, in exceeding discomposure.

“What is this?”—opening it with some curiosity, for she had never seen the volume before—he had kept it in his desk, being one of those matters of business which, he said, “a woman couldn’t understand.”

“Nonsense, Josephine! Of course you knew.”

“What did I know?”

“That you have been spending so much money that you have nearly ruined me. Our account is overdrawn.”

“Our account overdrawn—what does that mean?” she said: not answering, except by a gentle sort of smile, the first half of his sentence. For she could not have been married these five years without learning one small fact—that her Edward sometimes made “large” statements, which had to be received *cum grano*, as not implying more than half he meant, especially when he was a little vexed.

“Mean! It means, my dear, that we have

not a halfpenny left in the bank, and that we owe the bank two pounds five—no, seven—I never can remember those stupid shillings!—over and above our account."

"Why did they not tell you before?"

"Of course, they thought it did not matter. A gentleman like me would always keep a banker's account, and could at any time put more money in. But I can't. I have not a penny-piece in the world beside my paltry salary. And it is all your fault—all your fault, Josephine."

Mrs. Scanlan was startled. Not that it was the first time she had been spoken to crossly by her husband : such an idyllic state of concord is quite impossible in ordinary married life, and in this work-a-day world, where men's tempers, and women's, too, are rubbed up the wrong way continually ; but he had never spoken to her with such sharp injustice. She felt it acutely ; and then paused to consider whether it were not possible that Edward was less to blame than she. For she loved him ; and,

to fond, idealizing love, while the ideal remains unbroken, it is so much easier to accuse oneself than the object beloved.

"It may be my fault, my friend—" she often called him affectionately "my friend," as she remembered hearing her mother address her father as "*mon ami*," and it was her delight to think that the word was no misnomer—every woman's husband should be, besides all else, her best, and dearest, and closest "friend." "But if it is my fault, I did not mean it, Edward. It was because I did not understand. Sit down here, and try to make me understand."

She spoke quite cheerfully, not in the least comprehending how matters stood, nor how serious was the conjuncture. When it dawned upon her; for, though so young and inexperienced, she had plenty of common sense, and a remarkably clear head at business,—she looked extremely grave.

"I think I do understand now. You put all the money we had, which was a hundred

pounds, into the bank, and you have fetched it out for me whenever I asked you for it, or whenever you wanted some yourself, without looking how the account stood—the ‘balance,’ don’t you call it?—and when you went to the bank to-day, you found we had spent it all, and there was nothing left. Isn’t that it?”

“Exactly so. What a sharp little girl you are; how quickly you have taken it all in!” said he, a little more good-tempered, having got rid of his crossness by the first ebullition, and being relieved to find how readily she forgave it, and how quietly she accepted the whole thing. For he had a lurking consciousness that, on the whole, he had been a little “foolish,” as he called it, himself, and was not altogether free from blame in the transaction.

“Yes, I think I have taken it all in,” said she, meditatively, and turning a shade paler. “I comprehend that the money I wanted I cannot get; that we shall be unable to get any more money for anything until Mr. Oldham pays you your next half-yearly salary.”

"Just so. But don't vex yourself, my love. It will not signify. We can live upon credit; my father lived upon credit for I don't know how long."

Josephine was silent—through sheer ignorance. Her translation of the word "credit" was moral virtue, universal respect: and she liked to think how deeply her husband was respected in the town; but still she did not understand how his good name would suffice to pay his butcher's and baker's bills, and other expenses, which seemed to have fallen upon them more heavily than usual this Christmas. To say nothing of another expense—and a strange pang shot through the young mother's heart, to think that it should ever take the shape of a burthen instead of a blessing—the third little olive-branch that was soon to sprout up round that tiny table.

"Edward," she said, looking at him entreatingly—almost tearfully, as if a sudden sense of her weakness had come upon her, and instinctively she turned to her husband for help—"Ed-

ward, tell me, if we can get no money, not till May, from Mr. Oldham, what am I to do—in March?"

"Bless my soul, I had forgotten that!" and the young man spoke in a tone of extreme annoyance. "You should have thought of it yourself; indeed, you should have thought of everything a little more. March! how very inconvenient! Well, it can't be helped. You must just manage as well as you can."

"Manage as well as I can," repeated Josephine slowly, and lifted up in his face her great dark, heavy eyes. Perhaps she saw something in that face which she had never seen before, some line which implied it was a weaker face, a shallower face than at first appeared. She had been accustomed to love it without reading it much—certainly without criticising it; but now her need was hard. Still harder, too, when, wanting it most, to come for comfort, and find none; or, at least so little that it was almost none. "He does not understand," she said to herself, and ceased speaking.

"It is very, very provoking, altogether most unfortunate," continued the curate. "But I suppose you can manage, my dear; labourers' wives do, with half the comforts that I hope you will have. Oh, dear! a poor curate is much worse off than a day-labourer. But as to the little nursemaid you were speaking to me about this morning, of course you will see at once that such an additional outlay would be quite impossible. She would eat as much as any two of us; and, indeed, we shall have quite enough mouths to fill—rather too many."

"Too many!"

It was but a chance word, but it had stabbed her like a sword—the first actual wound her husband had ever given her. And, by nature, Josephine Scanlan was a woman of very acute feelings, sensitive to the slightest wound; not to her pride, or her self-esteem, but to her affections and her strong sense of right and justice. She answered not a syllable; she turned away quietly—and stood looking out of the window towards where Ditchley church-spire rose

through the rainy mist. Then she thought, with a sudden, startling fancy, of the church-yard below it, where a grave might open yet,—a grave for both mother and babe—and so save the little household from being “too many.”

It was an idea so dreadful, so wicked, that she thrust it from her in haste and shame, and turned back to her husband, trying to speak in a cheerful voice of other things.

“But what about the two pounds five, or seven—which is it?—that you owe the bank? Of course we must pay it?”

“Oh, no, they will trust me; they know I am a gentleman.”

“But does not a gentleman always pay? My father thought so. Whatever comforts we went without, if the landlord came up for our rent, it was ready on the spot. My father used to say ‘*Noblesse oblige.*’”

“Your father,” began Mr. Scanlan, with a slight sneer in his tone, but stopped. For there stood, opposite to him, looking at him with steadfast eyes, the poor Vicomte’s daughter,

the beautiful girl he had married—the woman who was now his companion for life, in weal or woe, evil report or good report. She might not have meant it—probably was wholly unconscious of the fact—but she stood more erect than usual, with all the blood of the De Bougainvilles rising in her thin cheeks, and flaming in her sunken eyes.

“I should not like to ask the bank to trust us, Edward ; and there is no need. I paid all my bills yesterday for the month, but there are still three sovereigns left in my purse. You can take them, and pay. Will you ? At once ?”

“There is no necessity. What a terrible hurry you are in ! How you do bother a man ! But give me the money.”

“Edward !” As he snatched at the offered purse, half jest, half earnest, she detained him. “Kiss me ! Don’t go away angry with me. We are never surely beginning to quarrel ?”

“Not a bit of it. Only—well, promise to be more careful another time.”

She promised—almost with a sense of contrition—though she did not exactly know what she had to repent of. But when her husband was gone upstairs, and she lay down again, and began calmly thinking the matter over, her sense of justice righted itself, and she saw things clearer—alas! only too clear.

She knew she had erred, but not in the way Edward thought: in quite a contrary direction. How could she, a mistress and mother of a family, have been so unwise as to take everything upon trust, live merrily all that summer, supplying both herself and the household with everything they needed, without inquiring a syllable about the money; where it all came from, how long it would last, and whether she was justified in thus expending it!

“Of course, Edward did not think, could not calculate—it was never his way. His poor mother was right; this was my business, and I have neglected it. But I was so ignorant. And so happy—so happy!”

Her heart seemed to collapse with a strange,

cold fear—a forewarning that henceforward she might not too often have this excuse of happiness. It was with difficulty that she restrained herself before her husband; and the minute he had left her—which he did rather carelessly, and quite satisfied she was “all right now,”—she burst into such hysterical sobbing, that Bridget in the kitchen heard, and came in.

But when with fond Irish familiarity the girl entreated to know what was the matter, and whether she should run and fetch the master? Mrs. Scanlan gave a decided negative, which surprised Bridget as much as these hysterical tears.

Bridget and her master were not quite upon as good terms as Bridget and her mistress. Mr. Scanlan disliked ugly people; also he treated servants generally with a certain roughness and lordliness, which some people think it necessary to show, just to prove the great difference between them and their masters—which otherwise might not be sufficiently discernible.

But when she saw him from the window

striding across the common towards Ditchley, leaving the house, and never looking behind him, though he, and he only, must have been the cause of his wife's agitation, either by talking to her in some thoughtless way, or telling her some piece of bad news which he ought to have the sense to keep to himself, Bridget felt extremely angry with Mr. Scanlan.

However, she was wise enough to hold her tongue, and devote all her efforts to soothe and quiet her mistress, which was finally effected by a most fortunate domestic catastrophe ; César and little Adrienne being found quarrelling over the toasting-fork which Bridget had dropped in her hurry, and which was so hot in the prongs that both burnt their fingers, and tottered screaming to their mother's sofa. This brought Mrs. Scanlan to herself at once. She sat up, cuddled them to her bosom, and began comforting them as mothers can—by which she soon comforted herself likewise. Then she looked up at Bridget, who stood by her, silent and grim—poor Bridget's plain face was always so very grim when

she was silent—and made a half excuse or apology.

“I can’t think what made me turn so ill, Bridget. I have been doing almost nothing all day.”

“Doing! No, ma’am, it’s not doing, it’s talking,” replied Bridget, with a severe and impressive emphasis, which brought the colour to her mistress’s cheeks. “But the master’s gone to Ditchley, I think, and he can’t be back just yet,” she added triumphantly; as if the master’s absence at this crisis, if a discredit to himself, was a decided benefit to the rest of the household.

“I know. He has gone on business,” said Mrs. Scanlan. And then the business he had gone upon came back upon her mind in all its painfulness; she turned so deadly white once more that Bridget was frightened.

“Oh, ma’am!” she cried, “what in the world has happened?”

(Here I had better state that I make no attempt to give Bridget’s brogue. Indeed, when

I knew her she had almost none remaining. She had come so early into her mistress's service, and she had lived so long in England, that her Hibernicisms of speech and character had gradually dropped off from her; all except the warm heart and elastic spirit, the shrewd wit and staunch fidelity, which especially belong to her nation, neutralising many bad qualities, to which miserable experience forces us to give the bitter adjective—so “Irish.”)

“Nothing has happened,” said Mrs. Scanlan. “I suppose I am not quite so strong as I ought to be, but I shall soon be all right, I hope. Come, Baby, it’s near your bed-time; my blessing! don’t cry so! it goes to mother’s heart.”

She roused herself, and began walking up and down with Adrienne in her arms, vainly trying to still her cries and hush her to sleep, but looking herself so wretched all the time, so feeble, and incapable of effort, that Bridget at last said remonstratively—

“You’re not to do that, ma’am. Indeed, you’re not.”

"What do you mean," said Mrs. Scanlan, turning quickly round; "what am I not to do?"

"Not to be carrying that heavy child about. It isn't your business, ma'am, and you're not fit for it. And I'm not going to let you do it either."

"I must," said Mrs. Scanlan, in a tone so sharp that Bridget quite started. Her mistress was usually excessively gentle in manner and speech—too gentle, Bridget, who had a tongue of her own, and a temper also, sometimes considered. Nevertheless, the sharpness surprised her, but it was away in a minute.

Mrs. Scanlan turned round with tears in her eyes.

"I did not mean to be cross, Bridget. I only meant that I must learn to do a great many things that I have not hitherto done."

What things? Bridget wanted to know. Because *she* thought the mistress did quite enough, and too much; she should be very glad when they had a second servant.

"No, we shall not have a second servant."

Bridget stared.

"It is quite out of the question. We cannot possibly afford it ; Mr. Scanlan says so ; and, of course, he knows."

Josephine said this with a certain air of dignity, by which she wished to put a stop to the "argufying" that she feared ; but Bridget, instead, looked so shocked and disconsolate, that her mistress took the other tack, and began to console her.

"Really, we need not mind much about it. A girl of twelve would have been very ignorant and useless, and perhaps more of a trouble than a help ; and I shall be able to help much more by-and-by, and according as I get used to things. I was so very innocent of all house-affairs when I came here," added she, smiling, "but I think I grow cleverer every day now."

"Ma'am, you're the cleverest lady I ever knew. And you took to house-keeping like a duck to the water. More's the pity ! you that can play music, and talk foreign tongues, and

work beautiful with your fingers—and there you are washing dishes, and children's clothes, and children—with those same pretty fingers. I'd like to tie 'em up in a bag."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Scanlan, laughing outright now: she and Bridget often laughed together, and with their French and Irish light-heartedness, even amidst the hardest work, and the cloudiest days. "But, seriously, think how many mothers have to take care of their own children without any nursemaid—without any help at all—and I have yours. And three will not be much more trouble than two; indeed, this morning one of my neighbours consoled me by saying that, after two children, even ten did not make much difference."

"And we may have ten!" said Bridget, with a very long face; and a grave personal appropriation of the responsibility, which at first made her mistress laugh again:—then suddenly turn grave, muttering to herself something in French. For the first time it had occurred to Mrs. Scanlan, that circumstances might arise in

which these gifts of God were not altogether blessings. The thought was so painful, so startling, that she could not face it. She drove it back, with all the causes which had suggested it, into the innermost corners of her heart. And with her heart's vision she utterly refused to see—what to her reason's eyes would have been clear enough—that her husband had acted like a child, and been as vexed as a child when his carelessness came to light. Also that the carelessness as to worldly matters, which does not so much signify when a man is a bachelor—and has nobody to harm but himself (if ever such a state of isolation is possible)—becomes an actual sin when he is married and has others depending on him,—others whom his least actions must affect vitally, for good or ill.

But as she walked up and down the room, rocking Edward's child to sleep—Adrienne was the one of her babies most like her father, César being entirely a De Bougainville—Josephine could not think hardly of her Edward. He would grow wiser in time, and meanwhile the

least said or thought of his mistake the better. Nor did she communicate any further of it to Bridget, beyond saying, that, besides omitting the little nursemaid, they would henceforward have to be doubly economical: for Mr. Scanlan and herself had decided they were spending a great deal more money than they ought to spend.

“Ugh!” said Bridget, and asked no more questions: for she was a little afraid of even her sweet young mistress when it pleased her to assume that gentle reserve. But the shrewd servant, nevertheless, made up her mind that, by fair means or foul, by direct inquiry, or by the exercise of that sharp Irish wit, in which the girl was by no means deficient—she would find out what had passed between the husband and wife, to make her mistress so ill. Also, whether there was any real occasion for her master’s extraordinary stinginess.

“It’s not his way! quite the contrary,” thought she, when, while Mrs. Scanlan was hushing baby to sleep, she slipped up and put to rights the one large room which served as

bed-room for both parents and children ; finding Mr. Scanlan's clothes scattered over César's little bed ; crumpled shirts without end (for he had been dressing to dine out) ; and half-a-dozen pairs of soiled lavender gloves. "What business has he to wear lavender kid gloves, I should like to know ?" said Bridget to herself, rather severely. "They'd have bought Master César two pairs of boots, or the mistress a new bonnet. Ugh ! men are queer creatures—I'm glad I wasn't a man, anyhow."

CHAPTER III.

AFTER this day, the Curate's family began painfully to recognise, that they were really "poor" people.

Not that Mr. Scanlan's salary was small; indeed, the Rector had been most liberal; but the real property of a family consists, not so much in what comes in, as in what goes out. Had they never been richer than now, no doubt they would have considered themselves tolerably well off, and have received smiling even the third little "encumbrance," which ere long made the little cottage too busy and too noisy for Mr. Scanlan to "study" there with any sort of comfort. Not that he was fond of reading, or ever read very much; but he liked to have his books about him, especially the Greek and Latin ones:

it “looked well,” he said. He had come to Ditchley breathing a great aroma of classical learning, and he did not like it to die out: it gave him such an influence in the parish. So he was much annoyed to find that it was now difficult to keep up the appearance of a man of literature; for instance, his few books had daily to be cleared away that the family might dine upon his study-table—and though that rarely incommoded him personally, he being so often absent at the dinner-hour—and invariably on “fast-days,” as Bridget called them, she having been once a Catholic. She was not one now; having soon expressed her willingness to turn Protestant, or indeed any religion that Mrs. Scanlan chose: she wished to go to heaven with her mistress, she said, and how she went, or by what road, was of no great consequence.

These “fast-days” were always made a joke of, by both her, her mistress, and the children, who were brought up to accept them as natural circumstances. But the truth was, the little family did not eat meat every day; they could

not afford it. They always chose for their maigre days, those days when Mr. Scanlan was out—which happened pretty frequently—for he had all the parochial visiting to do : the parish was large, and the houses scattered. Moreover, he was so agreeable—had such a deal to say for himself, and such a pleasant Irish way of saying it, that everybody was delighted to see him. His welcome from house to house was universal, and his invitations were endless. At first he used to refuse them, not liking to go anywhere without his wife ; but when her accompanying him began to grow difficult, nay impossible, he refused less and less. The neighbours were so very pressing, he said, and he could not well offend his own parishioners. Gradually, as the summer advanced, their eagerness for his society grew to that pass, that he might have dined away from home every day in the week ; in fact he often was absent three or four days out of the seven.

At first, I think his young wife fretted a good deal about this. She did not care to have him stopping at home all day long ; the children

were a weariness and a trouble to him, for there was no nursery to hide them in ; and besides, she could not do her duty properly to them when he was there. Nor to him—as she often vexed herself with thinking—when they, poor little pets ! were always wanting her, and always in the way. But she would have preferred to see her husband come regularly home of evenings. She would have liked to sit and watch for him across the common at a certain fixed hour ; to have known that—punctual as the sun—he would have come in and shone upon her ; her sun-rising being at the ordinary sun-setting—the close of the day. It would have been good for her, and sweet to her, she knew, if, though he disliked to be troubled and worried—and she should always avoid that—he had taken a kindly, husbandly interest in things at home. It would have helped her, and made her strong, braver, and fresher to bear the thousand little household burthens that are, in the total, so heavy—men have little idea how heavy ! —upon women's weak shoulders. Especially

young women—who have yet to learn how God fits the back to the burthen, and how He never suffers the brave heart to fail, however tottering may be the feeble knees.

But Mr. Scanlan did not seem to understand these little difficulties of his wife. He was very kind, very affectionate; but it never occurred to him that she, being young and inexperienced, needed help as well as love, shelter as well as sunshine. He was very good when all was smooth and bright, but when any temporary cloud came over Wren's Nest, as clouds will come—slight sicknesses of the children, or small domestic cares of any kind—he just slipped away, and left her to bear the brunt of the battle. True, when he reappeared, he overwhelmed her with praise for having borne it so exceedingly well; which was most pleasant to his wife's heart—so pleasant that it seldom occurred to her till afterwards, that the battle might have been easier, had she not been left to fight it single-handed.

Still, a husband at home all day is a great

nuisance, especially with a young family ; and she was not always sorry for Mr. Scanlan's absence, particularly at dinner-time. Women can put up with so many things that are intolerable to men. When butcher's meat ran short, Bridget developed quite a genius for puddings, which delighted the children amazingly. And then their mother tried her delicate hand at various French cookeries which she remembered out of "the days of her youth," as she began to call them now, and especially the *pot-au-feu*, which her mother used to see when, as the young demoiselle of the château, she was taken by her nurse to visit old Norman cottages. She loved to tell about this wonderful Normandy to her little César, who listened eagerly, with the precocity not rare in eldest children, when the circumstances of the household compel them to the lot—often a most happy one—of being constantly under the mother's eye, and constituted the mother's principal companion.

These details I take from the Saturday night's journal, which Mrs. Scanlan kept so scrupul-

ously and for so many years. It was, as I have said, written in French, her fondly-remembered native tongue, but it was not at all French in its style, being quite free from that sentimental exaggeration of feeling which makes French journals and letters of the last century or half-century seem so queer and affected to our British undemonstrativeness. Hers was as plain, as accurate, as if she had been the "thorough Englishwoman"—into which, as their summit of well-meant praise, her neighbours told her she was growing. She records the fact, but makes no comment thereon.

Nor will I. I believe firmly in the science of anthropology ; that you might as well expect to evolve certain qualities out of certain races, as to grow a rose out of a tulip ; but you can modify both rose and tulip to an almost infinite extent, cultivating their good points, and repressing their bad ones ; and to quarrel with a tulip because it is not a rose, is certainly an act of supreme folly, even though one may like the rose far better. I myself own to having a warm

love for roses, and a strong aversion to tulips; yet when a certain great and good man once took me to his favourite tulip-bed, and dilated on its merits, exhibiting with delighted admiration the different sorts of blooms, I felt tempted to say within myself, Can I have been mistaken? is a tulip a desirable, not a detestable, flower after all? And I was such a tender hypocrite to my old friend, that I had not the courage to confess I had detested tulips all my life, but meant henceforward to have a kindly feeling towards them—for his sake.

So those of my readers who hate French people and Irish people, with their national characteristics,—may be a little lenient to both, as they read on farther in this story.

Mrs. Scanlan's neighbours, though they did pay her these doubtful compliments, as to her foreign extraction, were very kind and neighbourly. They admired her without being envious of her, for indeed there was no need. She came into competition with none of them. The young ladies, unto whom her beauty might

have made her a sore rival, were quite safe—she was already married. The matrons, with whom she might otherwise have contested social distinction, were also secure—she never gave entertainments, and competed for the queenship of society with no one. The one field in which, had she fought, she must certainly have come off victorious, there being no lady for miles round who was her equal in qualities, which I think are more French than English—in the gifts of being a good talker, a better listener; of making people comfortable together, without knowing why; and of always looking so sweet, and pleasant, and pleased with everything, that all people were perforce pleased, both with themselves and her;—from that grand arena Mrs. Scanlan retired: and so soon, that nobody had time to dislike her for succeeding in it.

She had another quality which made her popular at Ditchley—she always sympathised with her neighbours, and interested herself warmly in their affairs, without ever troubling

them with her own. I remember a certain line out of a once popular ballad, which then struck me as a very unfair balance of things, but which I have since recognised as the easiest and safest plan after all, with regard to all but the one or two intimate friends that one makes in a life-time—

“ So let us hope the future as the past has been will be ;
I will share with thee thy sorrows, and thou thy joys
with me.”

It illustrates exactly the unconscious creed and daily practice of Josephine Scanlan.

Thus, narrow-minded as Ditchley was in some things—as all country towns necessarily must be, and were then, before the era of railways, much more so than now—it had a warm heart, and kept the warmest side of it to the Curate’s wife, a stranger though she was. Of her small outside world, Mrs. Scanlan had nothing to complain. It may have criticised her pretty freely: very likely it did; but the criticisms fell harmless. She never heard them, or if

she had heard, would not have heeded. She was so entirely free from ill-nature herself, that she never suspected it in others. If people talked about her, what harm did it do her? She was very sure they never said anything unkind.

And, strange to relate, I believe they never did. She was so entirely simple and straightforward—ay, from the first day when she explained, quite unhesitatingly, the dire mystery which had agitated Ditchley for weeks, the Scanlan & Co. porter bottle!—that spite laid down its arrows unused, meanness shrank ashamed into its own dark corners, and even malice retired abashed before the innocent brightness of her unconscious face.

“Everybody likes me,” she said of herself at this time. “I really don’t know why they do it, but I am sure they do. And I am so glad. It is such a comfort to me.”

Was she beginning to need comfort—outside comfort—even already?

Her outside gaiety was certainly ceasing by

slow degrees. She was invited as usual, with her husband; but gradually it came to be an understood thing that Mr. Scanlan went and Mrs. Scanlan remained at home.

“She could not leave the baby,” was at first a valid and generally accepted excuse, and by the time it ceased to be available, her absence had become such a matter of habit, that nobody wondered at it. For awhile the “everybody” who liked her so much missed her a little, and even remonstrated with her as to whether she was not sacrificing herself too much to her family, and whether she was not afraid of making Mr. Scanlan angry, in thus letting him go out alone?

“Oh, no!” she would reply, with a faint smile, “my husband is not at all angry. He quite understands the state of the case.”

He did understand, after his fashion—that is, he presently discovered that it is somewhat inconvenient to take into society a wife who has no carriage to go out in, but must spoil her elegant attire by walking. Or, still worse, who

has no elegant attire at all, and wherever she appears is sure to be dressed more plainly than any lady in the room.

It may seem ridiculously small, but the subject of clothes was now growing one of the burthens of Mrs. Scanlan's life. She had never thought much of dress before her marriage, and afterwards her rich toilette had been accepted by her both pleasantly and naturally. Everybody about her dressed well, and so did she, for her husband liked it. Fortunately her good clothes were so many, that they lasted long after her good days—that is to say, her rich days—were done.

But now the purple and fine linen began to come to an end, and were hopeless of replacement. The first time she went to Ditchley to buy herself a new dress, which her husband declared she must have, she was horrified to find that a gown like one of her old worn-out ones would involve the sacrifice of two months' income to the little household at Wren's Nest. So her dream of a new silk dress vanished ; she

brought home a muslin one, to the extreme indignation of Mr. Scanlan.

Poor man! he could not understand why clothes should wear out, and as little why they should not be perpetually renewed. He had never seen his mother dress shabbily—why should his wife do so? His wife, upon whom his credit rested. If she had only herself to consider, it would not have signified; but a married lady—the Reverend Edward Scanlan's wife—was quite another thing. He could not see the reason for it: she must be learning slatternly ways; yielding to matronly untidiness, as he saw young mothers sometimes do—which he always thought a great shame, and a great unkindness to the husband. Which arguments were perfectly true in the main, and Josephine recognised the fact. Yet the last one went rather sharply into the young matron's heart.

She changed her style of dress altogether. Her costly but no longer fresh silks and satins were put away—indeed, they fell away of themselves, having been remodelled and altered to

the last extremity of even French feminine ingenuity. She now appeared almost exclusively in cotton print of a morning, and white dimity of an afternoon : dresses which Bridget could wash endlessly, and which each week looked fresh and new again. Her children the same. She could not give them a clean frock every day as their father wished—every other child he saw had always a clean frock on, and why not his children ?—but she dressed them in neat blue-spotted pinafores—blouses she called them—the familiar French name—with a plain leather belt round the waist—and they looked so pretty, so very pretty!—or she and Bridget thought so many a time.

It is a curious and sad indication of how things changed after the first sunshiny summer at Wren's Nest, that the mistress and servant seemed to have settled their domestic affairs together, and shared their domestic griefs and joys, very much more than the mistress and master. Whenever there was a sacrifice to be made, or a vexation or fatigue to be endured, it

was they who suffered ;—anyhow *not* Mr. Scanlan. Mrs. Scanlan contrived to shield her husband—almost as she did her little children—from any household perplexity or calamity, and especially from a certain dim sound heard in the distance, every day approaching nearer and nearer—the howling of that blatant beast, “the wolf at the door.”

“ Hardships are so much worse to him than to me,” she would reason. “ With me, it is but just going back to old times, when I lived at home with my father, and we were so very poor—and so very happy too, I think ; whereas with my husband it is different. He has been rolling in money all his life—poor Edward !”

No doubt this was true. Nor do I wish to judge the Curate more harshly than his wife judged him. Besides, people are variously constituted ; their ideas of happiness are different. I can imagine that when Josephine Scanlan sat in front of her neat cottage—with César and Adrienne playing at her feet, and her baby-boy asleep on her lap—sewing hard, for she had

never done sewing—yet stopping a minute now and then to refresh her eyes with the sweet landscape—green low hills, smooth and sunny, which shut out the not very distant sea, beyond which lay *la belle France*, which she had always dreamed of, but never beheld,—I can imagine, I say, that it mattered very little to Josephine Scanlan whether she lived in a great house or a small one; whether she went clad in satin and velvet, or in the common dimity gown, which Bridget often sat up half the night to wash and iron for Sundays, and in which, as she went to church with a child in either hand, poor Bridget declared, the mistress looked “like an angel just dropped from the sky.”

Whether the rest of the congregation were of that opinion cannot now be discovered. They still paid occasional visits to Wren’s Nest, stopping in carriage-and-pair at the garden-gate, and causing Bridget a world of flurry to get a clean apron and smoothe her hair before rushing to open it. But it is a very different thing, paying visits in a carriage after an idle morn-

ing, and paying them on foot after a morning's hard work in arranging the house affairs, and looking after the children. Mrs. Scanlan had to explain this—which she did, very simply—to such of her husband's parishioners as were especially kind to her, and with whom she would have liked to associate, had fate allowed. Her excuses were readily and graciously accepted ; but, after a time, the natural results of such an unequal balance of things ensued. Her visitors became fewer and fewer : sometimes, in winter, whole weeks passed without a single foot crossing the threshold of Wren's Nest.

Necessarily, too, there came a decline in other branches of parish duty that Mr. Scanlan considered essential, and urged his wife to keep up ; which she did at first to the utmost of her power—Dorcas societies, district visiting, village school-feasts, and so on ; various forms of benevolence which had lain dormant until the young curate came. Ditchley, having a very small number of poor, and abounding in wealthy families with nothing to do, soon found charity

a charming amusement; and the different schemes which the new clergyman started for its administration, made him very popular.

But with Mrs. Scanlan the case was different.

"I can't sit making clothes for little negroes, and let my own children run ragged," said she once, smiling: and arguing half in earnest, half in jest—for she found that the latter often answered best—with her husband, who had been sharply reproving her. "And, Edward, it is rather hard to sit smilingly distributing fuel and blankets to the 'believing poor,' as you call them, when I remember how thinly-covered is poor Bridget's bed, and how empty our own coal-cellars. Still, I will do my best, since you wish it."

"Do so—there's a dear girl!" replied he, carelessly kissing her. "Charity looks so well in a clergyman, and a clergyman's wife. And, besides, giving to the poor is lending to the Lord!"

Mrs. Scanlan cast a keen glance at her hus-

band—she always did when he said these sort of things. She had begun to wonder how much they meant—at least how much he meant by them, and whether he really considered their meaning at all. I am afraid, for a clergyman's wife, she was not as religious a woman as she ought to have been ; but she had had too much of religion when she lived in Merrion Square. In that particular set to which her husband belonged, its cant phraseology had been painfully dinned into her ears. She recognised all the intrinsic goodness of the Evangelical sect, their sincere and earnest piety, but she often wished they could do without a set of stock phrases, such as Edward Scanlan had just used, which gradually came to fall on her ear as mere words, implying nothing.

“Lending to the Lord !” said she. “Then I wish He would begin to pay back a little that He owes me. I wish He would send me a new pair of shoes for each of the children. They want them badly enough.”

At which Mr. Scanlan looked horrified, es-

pecially as this unfortunate speech had been made in presence of his rector, Mr. Oldham, who had just come in for a call. Possibly, he did not hear, being very deaf, and using his deafness sometimes both conveniently and cleverly.

He was the one visitor whose visits never ceased, and were always welcome, for they caused no inconvenience. If the mother were busy, he would be quite content to talk to the children ;—who liked him well enough, though they were a little afraid of him, chiefly through their father's always impressing upon them that they must behave so exceedingly well when they went to the Rectory—which was now almost the only house in the neighbourhood they did go to.

At first, when César and Adrienne had acquired sufficiently walking capabilities and good manners, their father amused himself by taking them about with him pretty often ; but being not angels, only children, they sometimes vexed him considerably. They would get tired and cross ; or, from the great contrast of living at

home and abroad, they would be tempted—poor little souls—to over-eat themselves, which naturally annoyed the Curate much. By degrees both they and their mother found that going out with Papa was not unmixed felicity; so that when the habit was given up, it was a relief to all parties.

Gradually, the parents and children seldom appeared in public all together, except when they were invited to the Rectory—as they had been lately—to enjoy a strawberry feast, in the garden of which its owner was so justly proud.

“I am glad you approve of my roses,” said Mr. Oldham, when, with a half-deprecating, half-threatening look at his wife, lest she should make some other unlucky observation, Mr. Scanlan had disappeared on important parish business. “I often think, madame,”—(he changed his old-fashioned “madam” into madame, out of compliment to her birth, and because he liked to air his French a little)—“I think, my garden is to me what your children are to you. I only

hope it may be equally flourishing, and may reward me as well for all my care."

The Rector was sitting in the porch, his stick between his knees—he always wore breeches, gaiters, a long coat, and a large clerical hat—watching César, who was pulling up weeds in the somewhat neglected borders in front of the garden, but doing labourer's work with the air and mien of a young nobleman in disguise, a real Vicomte de Bougainville. One does see these anomalies sometimes, though I grant not often ; poor gentlefolks' children are often prone to sink to the level of the ordinary poor ; but Josephine had taken great pains in the upbringing of hers. As her eyes followed the direction of Mr. Oldham's, and then both their eyes met, there was in one countenance a touch of envy, in the other of pity,—which accounted for his frequent visits and the kindly welcome which she always gave him.

That is, of late years. At first, Mrs. Scanlan had been rather shy of her husband's rector, perhaps, like the children, because her husband

always impressed upon her the importance of being civil to him. Not until she found this needless—that the little old bachelor exacted nothing from her, and that, moreover, there was nothing to be got out of him—did Josephine become as friendly with Mr. Oldham as she was with her other neighbours. Her coldness seemed rather to amuse him ; nor did he ever take offence at it. He admired openly her beauty, her breeding, her good sense ; and with his own pedigree, a yard long, hanging up in his hall, it is probable that he did not think the less of his curate's wife for being descended from so many noble De Bougainvilles.

What the old Rector thought of his curate, people never quite discovered. He kept his opinion to himself. When the parish went crazy about Mr. Scanlan, his beautiful sermons, his many accomplishments, Mr. Oldham listened, silent ; when, as years ran on, a few holes were picked in the Curate's coat, he listened, equally silent. But he himself always treated Mr. Scan-

lan with pointed respect, courtesy, and consideration.

He sat watching the children—there were four now, “baby” being exalted into Louis, and another little white bundle lying across Mrs. Scanlan’s lap, as she sat busy at her ceaseless needle even while she conversed with her guest.

“Another girl, I understand, for I am to have the pleasure of christening her next Sunday. Are you offended with me, madame, for declining to be god-father? As you are aware, your husband asked me?”

She was not aware, and would have disliked it extremely; but she would not betray either fact, and therefore only smiled.

“What do you mean to do with your eldest son?” pointing to César. “As I was saying to his father, it is high time he went to school. But Scanlan tells me he prefers teaching him himself.”

“Yes,” said Josephine briefly, for her visitor had touched upon a sore point.

In early days her husband had been very proud of his “son and heir,” who was a fine little fellow, the image of the grandfather whose name he bore—for all the children had French names, Mr. Scanlan not caring to perpetuate the Dennis’s and Judiths of his ancestry. He had insisted on educating César himself—who could so well teach a boy as his own father? Only, unfortunately, the father had no aptitude for teaching, was extremely desultory in his ways, and, as he gave the lessons chiefly for his own amusement, took them up and relinquished them whenever it suited him. Consequently things went hard with little César. He was a bright, bold, noble lad, but he was not particularly clever nor over-fond of his book. Difficulties ensued. Not that Edward Scanlan was one of your brutal fathers : he never lifted his hand to strike his son—I should have liked to have seen the mother’s face if he had!—but he made her perpetually anxious and restless, because “Papa and César did not get on together,” and because, in spite of Papa’s classical acquirements,

her big boy, the pride of her heart, was growing up a great dunce.

Yet when she suggested sending him to school, Mr. Scanlan had opened eyes of the widest astonishment. What necessity was there? when he could teach him himself at home. Besides, how could they possibly afford the expense of schooling, when only lately she had told him, the father of the family, that he must do without a suit of new clothes for another six months? Differences ensued, which ended in César's remaining another year at home, while his mother learnt Latin in order to teach him herself. And, somehow or other, his father appeared at the next visitation in a bran-new suit of best London-made clerical clothes, dined with the Archbishop, and preached a sermon on the text of "Charity suffereth long and is kind;" which was so much admired that he came home covered with glory, and, except that it was, fortunately, extempore, would have gone to the expense of printing and publishing it immediately.

Thus, when Mr. Oldham spoke, Josephine replied with that quick “Yes,” and over her face came the shadow which he, who had all the quick observation which often belongs to deaf people, detected at once, and changed the conversation.

“I have my newly-married cousin, Lady Emma Lascelles, coming with her husband to dine with me on Thursday; will you come too? I asked Mr. Scanlan, and he accepted immediately.”

“Oh yes, of course he will be most happy.”

“I should like you to meet Lady Emma,” pursued the old gentleman; “she was a nice little girl, and I dare say has grown up a sweet young woman. She will be sure to take to you—I mean, you will suit her better than most of the ladies of Ditchley.”

“Indeed!” said the Curate’s wife, smiling.

“You see, they will all stand in such awe of her”—and there was a slight satirical expression on the Rector’s thin mouth. “It is not often a ‘lady’ in her own right comes our way.

Though the most innocent eagle that ever was, Emma will flutter our dovecote, even as Coriolanus ‘fluttered the Volsces in Corioli.’ You will see!”

“Shall I? No; I fear I shall not. I am sorry to decline your kindness, Mr. Oldham, but you know I never go out now. I have not been at a dinner-party for years.”

“So your husband said; but he said also that meeting Lady Emma was an exceptional case, and that I was to persuade you to go, as he wished it extremely.”

“Did he? did he really?” said Josephine, with a sudden glow of pleasure; she had not grown quite insensible to the amusements of life, still less to that keenest enjoyment of them—to a wife—the consciousness that her husband likes to enjoy them with her; that he is proud of her, and admires her himself, besides having a natural satisfaction in seeing other people admire her too. But scarcely had she spoken than the glow faded. “I think you must have mistaken him, Mr. Oldham. My husband knows

very well I do not visit. Indeed, I cannot do it."

"Why not?"

The Rector was a daring man to put the question, but he had often wished to get an answer to it. Observant as he was, his observation only went a certain length; and intimate as Mrs. Scanlan now was with him, her intimacy had its limits too. So neat was Wren's Nest whenever he called, so great was its mistress's feminine ingenuity in keeping in the background all painful indications of poverty, that the rich man, who had been rich all his days, never guessed but that his curate was exceedingly comfortable in his circumstances, indeed rather well-off for a curate. Thus, when he asked, "Why not?" he had no idea that he was putting any painful or intrusive question, or saying anything beyond a joke, which, as an old man and a clergyman, he might well venture.

When he saw Mrs. Scanlan look grave and troubled, he drew back immediately.

"I beg your pardon. Pray do not answer me."

"No; I think I had rather answer, once for all," said she, after a pause. "It is but honest, and it will prevent your thinking me ungrateful or rude. I have given up visiting, because, in truth, we cannot afford it."

"I am aware, madame," said Mr. Oldham, "that fate, which has given you almost everything else, has denied you riches; but I think that should not affect you socially—certainly not in the visits with which you honour my house. Let me hope still to see you on Thursday."

"I cannot," she said, uneasily; then laughing and blushing, "If there were no other, there is one very ridiculous reason. This is a grand bridal party, and I have no suitable clothes!"

"Why not come as you are? This is white," touching, half-reverentially, half-paternally, her dimity dress. "Would not this do?"

She shook her head. "I should not mind it; if I were dressed ever so plainly, I should like

to come. But—my husband——” She stopped, for the same slightly satirical expression crossed the old man’s mouth.

“I have no doubt my friend Scanlan has perfect taste; and, being an old bachelor, I cannot be expected to understand how husbands feel on the subject of their wives’ dress. Still, if I had a wife, and she looked as charming as madame looks at this moment, whatever her costume might be, I should—— But we will not further discuss the subject. Thursday is a good way off; before then I shall hope to bring you or your husband, or both, round to my opinion. May I go into the house, Mrs. Scanlan? for it is growing rather chill outside for an old man like me.”

He went in, and sat an hour or more with her and the children; but, though he talked on indifferent subjects, and asked no further questions, she could see his sharp eyes wandering here, there, and everywhere, as if a new light had broken in upon him, and he was anxious to discover everything he could respecting the

internal economy of Wren's Nest. Such a shabby little nest as it was now growing! with carpets wearing threadbare and curtains all darned, and furniture which had to be kept neat and pretty by every conceivable device—all those things which a woman's eye at once discovers, a man's never, unless they are brought pointedly to his notice, or his attention is awakened so that he begins to hunt them out for himself.

Mr. Oldham talked a good deal, and looked about him a good deal more; but not a syllable said he with reference to the matter which, the moment she had referred to it, Josephine could have bit her tongue off for doing so. Not that she was ashamed of her poverty, in itself—she had been brought up in too lofty a school for that—but she was ashamed of the shame her husband felt concerning it. And anything like a betrayal of it before his patron would have seemed like begging for an increase of income, which she knew Mr. Scanlan desired, and thought his just due, and which every half-

year she had some difficulty to keep him from applying for.

Therefore it was a real relief to Josephine when the Rector said not a word more of the dinner-party, until, just as he was leaving, he observed—

“By-the-by, I quite forget I had come to consult you upon whom I should invite to meet Lady Emma.”

“Me!”

“Who so fitting? Are you not hand-in-glove with all our neighbours? Do they not come to you for advice and sympathy on all occasions? Is there a birth, or a death, or a wedding in the parish that you don’t know all about before it happens?”

“It used to be so,” she said, half amused, half sadly; “and if not now, perhaps it is my fault. But tell me whom you mean to invite. I should like to hear all about the entertainment, though I do not go. It is such an important event in Ditchley, a dinner-party at the Rectory, and to a young bride.”

So she took pencil and paper, and made out a list of names, he dictating them—for the old man seemed quite pleased with his little outburst of hospitality—until they came to one at which Mrs. Scanlan stopped.

“Dr. and Mrs. Waters. No; that will be useless. She—she does not go out.”

“Bless my soul! I had forgotten. How stupid of me!” cried Mr. Oldham; and then he too stopped, and his keen, inquisitive eyes sought Josephine’s. But she had dropped them, and was making idle marks upon the paper, to hide a certain awkwardness. They had both evidently hit upon a subject in which each was uncertain how much the other knew.

“I ought not to have forgotten. My good old friend! Of course I must ask him, and—his wife.”

“You had better ask him without his wife,” said Josephine, quietly, with her eyes still cast down. “If you ask her, and she hears of it, she is sure to want to come; and—she ought not to come.”

"I suppose not. Poor Mrs. Waters! she is—ahem!—a great invalid."

Mrs. Scanlan was silent.

"I thought," said the Rector, clearing his throat, "that my poor old friend and I had arranged all between us, so that nobody in Ditchley was any the wiser for this—this sad affair. I hate gossip, and gossip about such a painful thing would be hard to bear. Waters and I took every precaution, and his house is a large house, and quite out of the town; one would have thought a person could be—ill—there without the whole town's knowing."

"I am not aware that the town does know; I hardly see how it can," said Josephine gently, for she saw how troubled the Rector was. She well knew why, only she had not expected so much warm feeling in the cold-mannered, lonely old man, who was supposed to care for nobody but himself.

"But *you* know?" said he anxiously. "Yes, from your face now I am sure of it. Tell me frankly, how much do you know?"

“Everything, I believe. I found it out by accident.”

“How long since?”

“Six months ago.”

“And you have never told—not a creature? And in the many times that I have spoken to you about the Waters family, you have never once betrayed that you knew anything? Well, you are a wonderful woman—the only woman I ever knew who could hold her tongue.”

“Am I?” said Josephine, smiling, half sadly, for she had had a few sharp lessons—conjugal and domestic—before arriving at that height of perfection.

Still anxious, Mr. Oldham begged she would tell him exactly what she knew; and there came out one of those terrible domestic tragedies, which people always hide if they can, and which had hitherto been successfully hidden even from the gossiping Ditchley. Dr. Waters’ wife, of whom he was very fond, had suddenly gone mad, and tried to destroy both him and herself. The fit over without harm, she had partially recovered,

but still required to be kept in strict seclusion as a “great invalid,” appearing little outside her own house, and then only with her so-called “nurse,”—in reality her keeper. This woman, once meeting Mrs. Scanlan when she had lost her mistress on the common, and was frantically searching for her, had betrayed the whole sad truth, imploring her to keep the secret, which she did faithfully.

“Even from your husband?” inquired, rather pointedly, Mr. Oldham.

“Yes. It did not affect him, nor would he have taken much interest in the matter,” she answered, half apologetically. She could not say the other fact—that he would have told it the next day, quite unwittingly, to everybody in Ditchley. “Besides, I had promised, and a promise ought to be kept implicitly.”

“Certainly, my dear madame, certainly!”

The old man sat rubbing his hands, and looking at her with great admiration.

“A remarkable woman—the most remarkable woman I ever knew!” Then, as a knock came

to the door, “There is Scanlan coming home to his tea, and I must go to my dinner. I will just shake hands with him and depart. Adieu, madame. *Au revoir.*”

He bowed over her hand—his quaint, formal, little bow—and disappeared.

But the next day Mrs. Scanlan received by coach, from the largest linen-draper’s shop in the county town, a magnificent silk dress, richer than anything ever seen in Ditchley. With it was an envelope, addressed to herself, containing these lines, written in French, and in the delicate, precise hand, which was at once recognisable—

“From an old man, in token of his respect for a lady who can both keep a promise and hold her tongue.”

Alas! by this time there was no need for Mrs. Scanlan to hold her tongue any longer. Mrs. Waters had had another “attack,” during which she had gone—Ditchley never quite knew how—to that world where she would wake up in her right mind, and Heaven would be as tender

over her as her dearly-loved and loving husband was, to the last, in this.

There was no dinner-party at which to show off the beautiful new gown ; the Rector was too shocked and sad to give any. But Lady Emma came, and Mrs. Scanlan saw her, greatly to Mr. Scanlan's delight. Nay, the bride praised so warmly his Josephine, that he admired her himself more than ever, for at least ten days, and took great interest in the handsome appearance she would make in her new silk dress. But Mrs. Scanlan herself had little pleasure in it ; and though she thanked the Rector for it, and accepted it kindly—as indeed the kindness of the gift deserved—she laid it by in a drawer, almost as sadly as if it had been a mourning weed.

CHAPTER IV.

ON Josephine Scanlan's lovely face a slight shadow was now deepening every year and with every child—for a child came almost every year. Fortunately—or at least so said the neighbours, but did the mother?—fortunately, not all were living; but ere ten years were past, Wren's Nest contained six little nestlings, growing up from babies into big boys and girls—César, Adrienne, Louis, Gabrielle, Martin, Catherine. Josephine had insisted on this latter name, in remembrance of her gentle, kindly, vulgar, good old mother-in-law, now long gone to her rest. Curiously enough, except Adrienne, who was the plain one of the family, but, as if by tender compensation, the sweetest little soul among them all, the whole of the children were

De Bougainvilles—handsome, well-grown, graceful; a young tribe that any mother might be proud of. And she was very proud of them, and very happy in them, at times—yet still the shadow in her face grew and grew.

There is a portrait of her, taken about this time, I believe, by a wandering artist who had settled for the summer at Ditchley, and with whom the Curate struck up one of his sudden friendships. Mr. Summerhayes, attracted by Mrs. Scanlan's beauty, requested permission to paint her; and afterwards, out of politeness, painted, as a companion-picture, her husband's likewise.

The two heads are very characteristic. The one is full of a lovely gravity, nay, something more, for the expression is anxious even to severity; in the other is that careless *insouciance* which may be charming in itself, but which has the result of creating in other people the very opposite. That painful earnestness about great things and small, that unnatural and exaggerated “taking thought for the morrow,” which

sometimes grows to be an actual misfortune, so as to make the misery of to-day—might never have come to Josephine, if her Edward had been blessed with a little more of these qualities. There is no need to do more than look at the two portraits, speaking so plainly through the silence of years, in order to detect at once the secret of their married life; how that the burden which the man shirked and shrunk from, the woman had to take up and bear. Josephine Scanlan did this, and did it to the end.

Without murmuring either, except, perhaps, just at the first. There might have been a season when, like most young wives and many-childed mothers, she had expected to be cherished and taken care of; to be protected as well as loved; helped as well as admired; but that time had passed by. Not without a struggle; still, it did pass, and she accepted her destiny; accepted it as a fact, nay, more, as a natural necessity. She was young and strong; physically, quite as strong as her husband, delicate though her appearance was; morally, no

person who was in their company for an hour could have doubted the relative calibre of Mr. and Mrs. Scanlan. A man is not necessarily a "man" in the true spiritual sense, because he happens to wear coat and trousers: nor is a woman always of the "weaker sex," because she has a soft voice, a quiet manner, and a feeble and feminine frame. I have seen many and many a couple in which, without any great external show of the thing, Nature seemed to have adapted herself to circumstances, and "turned the tables" in a most wonderful way between husbands and wives, giving to the one wherewithal to supply the other's lack; and that so gradually, so imperceptibly, that they themselves scarcely recognised how completely they had changed places—the man becoming the woman, and the woman the man. A sad sight theoretically, but, practically, often not so sad as it seems.

Possibly, Mrs. Scanlan grew to be dimly conscious of one fact as concerned herself and her husband,—that, whether or not she was the

cleverer, he being always considered such a brilliant and talented young man,—she was certainly the stronger, wiser, more sensible of the two. But at any rate she experienced its results, and accepted them, and the additional duties they involved, with a great, silent courage, such as the urgency of the case demanded. For she was a mother, and mothers must never know either despondency or fear.

If she began to look anxious and careworn, so careworn that it spoiled her beauty, and made her husband gradually become indifferent to whatever sort of dress she wore, it was no wonder. The mere thought of her children was enough to weigh her down night and day ; to say nothing of the incessant physical weariness of taking care of so many little folk, bright, loving, mischievous monkeys, who had all the activity of healthy, country-bred children, placed under the very simplest discipline, and a discipline that was, of necessity, wholly maternal ; for the father took less and less notice of them every day.

She did not spoil them, I think—at least Bridget protested she never did ; that she always kept a wholesome authority over them, and never indulged them in any way. Poor little souls ! there was small opportunity for indulgence in their primitive, all but penurious life ; but she was obliged to see them growing up around her, almost as wild as young colts ; deprived of every advantage which good food, good clothes, good society, and above all good education, give to young people ; that unconscious influence of outward things, which affects children, even at that early age, far more than we suspect.

Their mother saw all this ; knew all that they lacked ; which she would have given anything to provide them with. Yet here she was, bound hand and foot with the iron bands of poverty ; able to do almost nothing for them, except love them. She did that. God only knows how a mother's heart goes out to her children—with a perfect torrent of passionate devotedness—when in its other channel, deepest and holiest

of all, the natural stream is slowly drying up ;
or becoming, as Wordsworth mournfully sings
of it, no longer a living fountain, but

“ A comfortless and hidden well.”

I have no right to take anything for granted ;
but straws show which way the wind blows :
and I find in Mrs. Scanlan’s journal, hidden
under its safe French, many a sentence such as
this, which betrays a good deal more than ap-
pears on the surface :

“ My poor Adrienne is ailing, which casts a
gloom over the whole house, and makes me
busier than ever ; for she has grown to be such
a help to her mother, dear child ! I wish I
could take her to the sea, if only for a week ;
but how could I leave home ; leave Papa all to
himself ? Things would be sure to go wrong
if I did ; and, besides, Edward would be so very
uncomfortable. Nor should I like to propose it :
for it would cost a deal of money ; nearly as
much as that projected journey of his to Lon-
don with Mr. Summerhayes, against which I

have set my face so firmly, telling him he must give it up ; we could not possibly afford it.

“Nor can we. Even with all the lightening of my housekeeping through Mr. Oldham’s kindness” (the Rector had long ago given the children what he called “a quarter of a cow,” namely, a can of new milk daily, with eggs and butter, fruit and vegetables in unlimited supply, from his own farm and garden)—“even with all this, I shall scarcely succeed in making ends meet this Christmas ; and if we have any extraneous expenses out of the house, we shall not be able to pay our Christmas bills. And oh ! what a terrible thing that would be ; sorer than anything which has yet happened to us.”

Sore things had happened them, occasionally ; but she rarely noted them down except by implication. This, perhaps, was one of them.

“César, mon petit César, wearies me to let him learn drawing of Mr. Summerhayes. Not that he has any particular talent for it, but it

amuses him, and he likes it better than his book. And it takes him away from home—from our poor little house—going sketching about the country with Papa and Mr. Summerhayes. Not that they do much work ; indeed, I think Mr. Summerhayes has little need to work, he is not a ‘poor’ artist apparently ; but it is a lively, wandering, pleasant life, such as most men take to eagerly. I wish Edward did not take to it quite so much ; it does no good, and it is very expensive. I myself have no great faith, nor a very warm interest in this Mr. Summerhayes. Still, he is a pleasant young fellow enough ; my husband likes him, and so do my children, especially my two eldest. Poor little Adrienne, who, at eleven years old, is twice as clever as her brother in her drawing as in other things, though she is such a tiny dot of a child—Adrienne, I see, quite adores Mr. Summerhayes.”

“My” children—alas ! a deep meaning lies under that small word, that unimpressive, apparently unimportant “my.”

There came a period in Mrs. Scanlan's marriage—as it does in many a marriage, which looks comfortable enough to the world, and jogs on fairly to the last—when the wife was gradually becoming absorbed in the mother. Now, a voice at my elbow, and one I cannot choose but listen to, knowing it is often both wiser and tenderer than my own, whispers that this is a wrong thing, a wicked thing : that any woman who deliberately prefers her children to her husband, is unworthy the name of wife. To which I reply that no man, worthy the name of husband, need ever fear that his wife *will* love him less than she loves her children—the thing is unnatural, improbable, impossible. But all the shams in the world will not exalt an unworthy husband into a position which, even if he had it, he could not keep. He will find his level, and the children will find theirs, in the heart which is never likely to be very false to either.

But of that mysterious thing, love, it is as true as it is of most other things, what people

win they must earn. When Josephine de Bougainville married Edward Scanlan, she was a mere girl, little beyond a child, and he a grown man, at least he considered himself as such. When she developed into the woman that she was, a creature embodying more than any one I ever knew Wordsworth's picture of

“A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command,”—

he remaining still what he was, an average young man, no better than most young men and inferior to many, the difference between the two showed fearfully plain. Less in their mental than in their moral stature: Edward Scanlan was a very clever fellow in his way; brilliant with all Hibernian brilliancy, and the Hibernian aptitude of putting every talent well forward; so that, like the shops in the Rue de Rivoli and the Palais Royal—all the jewelry was in the windows. Of mere brains he had quite as much as she; or even if he had not, it would have mattered little. Many a clever woman loves passionately a not particularly

clever man, when she sees in his nature something which is different from, and nobler than her own. And seeing this she can always place herself, quite naturally, in the inferior attitude, which to all women and wives is at once so delicious and so indispensable.

But to wake up from that love-dream and find that its object is quite another sort of person from what he was fondly imagined to be ; that her affection towards him must, if it is to continue at all, entirely change its character, and become not a loving up but a loving down —an excusing of weaknesses, a covering over of faults, perhaps a deliberate pardoning of sins —this must be, to any wife, a most awful blow. Yet it has happened, hundreds of times ; and women have survived it, even as they survive love-disappointments, and losses by death, and other agonizing sorrows, by which Heaven teaches us poor mortals that here is not our rest ; and that, deeper than anything stock phraseology can teach, comes back and back upon us the lesson of life—to lay up our trea-

sure not over-much in this world, but in that world “where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.”

The blow falls, but, happily, it seldom falls suddenly. And being so utterly irremediable, women, especially those who have children, become reconciled to it ; make the best of it ; take it as other women have done before them, and pass gradually out of its first blinding darkness into that twilight stage of much-enduring matrimony, which seems to be the lot of so many, and with which so many are apparently quite content. Nevertheless, to those happy wives, who, thank God ! know what it is to live daily and hourly in the full daylight of satisfied love, such a region appears only a better sort of Hades, peopled with the flitting ghosts of departed joys.

Into that silent valley of endless shade the young matron, Josephine Scanlan, had slowly passed.

I do not allege that her husband was unkind

to her ; personal unkindness was not in his nature ; he was far too easy and good-tempered for that. It would almost have been better if he had been a little unkind sometimes. Many a bad-tempered man is not essentially a bad man, and a woman like Josophine could have borne patiently some small ill-usage, had it come from a husband whom in other things she could deeply respect. I have heard her say sometimes, “that common men break their wives’ heads, and gentlemen their hearts : and the former was a less heinous crime than the latter.” Be that as it may, I think she herself would have borne any personal wrong easier than to sit still, and endure the maddening sight of watching her youth’s idol slowly crumble down into the very commonest of clay.

It may be urged, first, why did she set him up as an idol, when he was but an ordinary man ? Well, that may have been a very silly thing, yet do not all women do it ? And would their love be much worth having if they did not do it ?—Secondly, finding him to be what

he was, why did she not try to improve him?

It is a melancholy fact that some men cannot be improved. A strong nature, warped to evil, may be gradually bent back again to good; but over a weak nature no person has any power; there is nothing to catch hold of; it is like throwing out the ship's sheet-anchor into shifting sands. Edward Scanlan's higher impulses were as little permanent as his lower ones. "Unstable as water thou shalt not excel," had been his curse through life; though—so bright and sweet are the self-delusions of youth—it was not for some years that his wife discovered this.

And, mercifully, Ditchley did not discover it at all—at least, not for a long time. It was one of those failings which do not show outside. He was still the most interesting of men and of clergymen; played first fiddle in all societies; and if he did hang up that invaluable instrument at his own door, why, nobody was any the wiser: his wife never told. Perhaps, indeed, it was rather a comfort to her to have

the fiddling silenced within the house—it would have been such a cruel contrast to the struggle that went on there: the continual battle with toil, poverty, and grinding care.

The one bit of sunshine at Wren's Nest was undoubtedly the children. Rough as they were, they were very good children, better than many rich men's offspring in their self-denial, self-dependence, and uncomplaining gaiety amidst all deprivations, which they, however, having never known anything better, did not much feel. Here, too, the Irish light-heartedness of their faithful Bridget stood them in good stead; and their mother's French adaptability taught them to make the best of things. The little girls began to do house-work, sew, and mind the baby; the little boys to garden and help their mother in all sorts of domestic ways; and this at an age when most children are still in a state of nursery helplessness, or worse. The incessant activity of little people, which in well-to-do households finds no outlet but mischievousness, here was always led into

a useful channel, and so did good instead of harm. Work became their play, and to "help Mama" their favourite amusement. She has many an entry in her diary concerning them, such as this :—

"This morning, Adrienne, standing on a stool at my ironing-table, began to iron pocket-handkerchiefs, and really, for her first attempt, did it quite beautifully. She was so proud ; she means to iron every week now, and I mean to let her, provided it does not injure her poor back, which not yet is as strong as it should be. I shall not, however, allow her to carry the next baby." Alas ! the "next" baby.

Or this :—

"César and Louis went up to the Rectory all by themselves to fetch a great bundle of young cauliflowers, which my children are so fond of, saying, when I cook them French fashion, meat at dinner is quite unnecessary. They planted them all by themselves, too. Papa said he would show them how, but he happened to be

out. He takes very little interest in the garden; but my two boys are born gardeners, and love every inch of the ground, and every living thing upon it. I wish they may make it produce more than it does, and then we need not accept so much from the Rectory. It is always a bad thing to be too much dependent upon even the kindest of neighbours; and so I often say to the children, telling them they must learn to shift for themselves—as assuredly they will have to do—and try and be as independent as possible.

“I had to tell them yesterday that they must try and do without sugar to their tea—grocery is so very dear now. They pulled a wry face or two at the first cup, but afterwards they did not complain at all, saying ‘that what Mama did, surely they could do.’ My children are such exceedingly good children.”

So it came to pass that, finding, young as they were, she could actually respect and trust them more than she could their father, she gradually loved them best. A mournful truth;

but does any mother wonder at it? I, for one, do not.

No household is very dreary so long as it has children in it—good children, and merry with all the mirth of youth. The little Scanlans must have had their fill of mirth; their happiness made their mother happy also, in a sort of reflected way. She was still young enough to become a child with them, to share in all their holiday frolics, their primrose gatherings, hay-makings, nuttings, skatings, and slidings. All the year round there was something doing, in the endless variety which country children enjoy. But from these festivals the father was usually absent. They were “not in his line,” he said; and when he did go, he enjoyed himself so little, that the rest of the young party found in plain language “his room was better than his company.” That grand and lovely sight—I use advisedly these strong adjectives—of a father taking a day’s pleasure with all his children round him—stooping from his large worldly pursuits to their small unworldly ones;

forgetting himself in the delight of making them happy, with a happiness which they will remember long after he is laid in dust—this sight was never seen at Ditchley, so far as concerned the Scanlan family. If Ditchley ever noticed the fact, reasons for it were never lacking. Poor Mr. Scanlan's parish duties were so very heavy;—it was quite sad to think how little he saw of his family—how continually he was obliged to be away from home.

That was true; only, strange to say, nobody at home seemed much to miss his absence. Perhaps, unconsciously, the little folks betrayed this; and, as they grew up—being remarkably simple and straightforward children—found it difficult not to let their father see that they had discovered certain weak points in his character—inaccuracies and exaggerations of speech, selfishnesses, and injustices of action—which discovery could hardly have been altogether pleasant to Mr. Scanlan. He gradually ceased to look oftener than he could help into César's honest eyes, which sometimes expressed

such intense astonishment, to say the least of it, at the father's words and ways; and he gave up petting little Adrienne, who sometimes, when he did something that "grieved Mama," followed him about the house with mute looks of such gentle reproach that he could not stand them. His love of approbation was so strong that he could not bear to be disapproved of, even by a child; but he did not try to amend matters and win approval; he only got vexed, and took the usual remedy of an uneasy conscience—he ran away.

Alas for his wife! the woman who had to excuse him not only to herself but to these others—the quick-sighted little people, whose feelings were so fresh and clear—what must her difficulties have been? And when, all excuses failing before her stern sense of absolute right,—that justice without which mercy is a miserable weakness or a cowardly sham—that duty towards God, which is beyond all obedience to man—she had, as her sole resource, to maintain a dead silence towards her children with re-

gard to their father—how terrible her trial!

The only comfort was, that nobody knew it. Ditchley pitied the Curate's wife for many things; because she had such narrow means and such a large family; because, being such a charming, elegant, and accomplished woman, she was only a curate's wife, doomed to have her light hidden under a bushel all her days. But it never thought of pitying her for the one only thing for which she would have pitied herself—the blank in her heart where an idol should have been—the sad silence there instead of singing—the dull patience and forbearance which had taken the place of joy and love.

No wonder that her beauty began to fade, that her cheerfulness declined, or was only prominent in her intercourse with children—her own and other people's. Grown-up people she rather avoided; her neighbours, with whom she had been so popular once, said among themselves that Mrs. Scanlan was not quite so pleasant as she used to be; was overridden by domestic cares, and growing rather unsocial, hard,

and cold. Nay, some of them sympathised with her husband in having so little of a companion in his wife, and quite understood how it was he went out so much, and alone; one or two married ladies, who were very well off and had no children, blamed her openly for this; and said it was "all her fault if Mr. Scanlan went too much into society."

Mrs. Scanlan heard it, of course. Birds of the air always carry such a matter. She heard, and set her lips together in that stern hard line which was becoming natural to them,—but she said not a word. She never defended herself at all, either then or afterwards. So, by degrees, the kindest of the Ditchley ladies left her to herself, to carry out her lonely life at Wren's Nest, which was a good mile away from the town and its prying gossip. Often she passed days and weeks without receiving a single visitor, and then the visiting was confined to an exchange of calls, at long intervals, kept up, Ditchley owned, for civility's sake, and chiefly out of respect to Mr. Scanlan. He

was popular enough; not run after quite as much as at first, perhaps, yet still very well liked in the neighbourhood, and always welcome in any society. But it was such exceedingly uphill work keeping up acquaintance with Mrs. Scanlan.

One person, however, maintained towards her a firm fidelity, and that was the Rector. Not that he showed it in any strongly demonstrative way—he was by no means a demonstrative man—but he always spoke of her in the highest terms, as “a first-rate woman,” and specially “a woman who could hold her tongue.” And though, from something she let fall in thanking him for her silk dress, he delicately forbore making her any more personal presents, his thoughtful kindness with regard to the children was continual.

He did not raise his curate’s salary, in spite of many a broad hint from that gentleman; but he helped the household in many a quiet way, often obvious to no one but the mistress of it—and to Bridget, who had a very great respect for

Mr. Oldham—at least, so far as was consistent with her evident and outspoken disapprobation of men as a race, and especially as clergymen.

“I’d like to put my missis in the pulpit,” said this excellent woman, who lived before the great question of woman’s rights was broached. “I wonder what she’d say? Anyhow, she’d say it better than most men; and she’d act up to it too, which isn’t always the way with your parsons. Their religion’s in their head and in their mouths; I’d like to see it a bit plainer in their lives.”

This may show that the Curate’s was not exactly a “religious” family. They kept up all the forms of piety; had prayers twice a day, and so on; the Bible, lying always open on Mr. Scanlan’s desk, and tossing about in his coat-pockets, was read aloud enough, especially the Epistles, for all the household to know it by heart. But Bridget once told me, her mistress had confessed that, for years, to hear certain portions of the Bible read actually turned her sick, un-

til she had laid it aside long enough to come to it with a fresh and understanding soul, free from all the painful associations of the past.

And so the Scanlan household struggled on, living “from hand to mouth”—with often a wide space between the hand and the mouth; while many a time it needed all Josephine’s vigilance to take care that even the hand which led to the mouth—those poor hungry mouths of her dear children!—should be strictly an honest hand. For that creed of the De Bougainvilles, “*No-blesse oblige*,” which held that a gentleman may starve, but he must neither beg nor borrow—this creed was not the creed of the Scanlan family. It was Mrs. Scanlan’s hardest trial to keep sternly before her children’s eyes that code of honour which her husband talked about, but neither practised nor believed in. And when at last the climax came—when their “difficulties” increased so much that it was obvious the year’s income could not possibly meet the year’s expenses—then she recognised fully what a deathblow it is to all conjugal peace

and domestic union, when the husband holds one standard of right and the wife another; or rather, when it is the wife only who has any fixed standard of right at all.

As usual, the collapse came suddenly, that is, the discovery of it; for Mr. Scanlan would go on for days and weeks playing on the brink of the precipice, rather than acknowledge it was a precipice, or speak of it as such. He disliked even to open his lips on what he called "unpleasant subjects." He left all these to his wife. "Do you manage it, my dear," he would say; "you manage so beautifully." The little flattery only now awoke in her a passing smile, but she managed the troubles for all that.

At length a day came when she could not manage them any longer; when she was obliged to insist upon her husband's speaking out his mind to her upon the critical position of their affairs.

Very much astonished was poor Mr. Scanlan! Surely this pressure must be all a mistake, springing from his wife's overweening anxiety

about money matters ; an anxiety common to all mothers, he thought.

“ It is not a mistake,” said she calmly, though with a hot cheek. “ See here !”

And she laid before him, written out, in plain black and white, all the sums they owed and all the money they had in hand to meet them. It was a heavy deficit.

Mr. Scanlan took up the paper carelessly. “ How neatly you have set it all down, and what capital arithmetic ! Really, Josephine, you ought to apply for a situation as clerk and book-keeper somewhere.”

“ I wish I could !” said she beneath her breath ; but her husband either did not or would not hear. Still he looked a little vexed.

“ You should have told me this before, my dear !”

“ I have told you, but you said it did not matter, and that I was not to trouble you with it. Nor would I have done so till the last extremity.”

“ I can’t conceive what you mean by the last

extremity. And how has it all come about? It must be your fault, for you manage everything, and spend everything."

"Not quite," said she, and put before him a second list of figures, in two lines, headed severally "House expenses," and "Papa's expenses." It was remarkable how equal the sum total of each was; and, naturally, this fact made papa very angry. He burst out into some very bitter words, which his wife received in stolid silence.

I do not here praise Josephine Scanlan; I think she must have gradually got into a hard way of saying and doing things, which, no doubt, was very aggravating to the impulsive Irish nature of her husband. He was fond of her still, in his sort of selfish way, and he liked to have her love and her approbation. He would have been much better pleased, no doubt, had she put her arms about his neck with "Never mind, dearest Edward!" and passed the whole thing over, instead of standing in front of him thus—the embodiment of moral

right—a sort of domestic Themis, pointing with one hand to those terrible lines of figures, and pressing the other tightly upon her heart, the agitated beating of which he did not know. But she stood quite still, betraying no weakness. The thing had to be done, and she did it, in what seemed to her the best and only way. There might have been another, a gentler way, but I do not know. Alas! that one unfailing strength of a wife, the power of appeal to her husband's conscience, certain that even if he has erred a little, his sense of duty will soon right itself; this engine of righteous power was wanting to poor Mrs. Scanlan. She had tried it so often and found it fail, that now she never tried it any more.

She stood in dead silence, waiting until his torrent of words had expended itself; then she said,

“Now, without more talking, we had better see what is best to be done.”

“Done? Why, what can we do? Where was the use of your coming to me about all

this? I'm not Midas; I can't turn pebbles into pounds!" And even in the midst of his annoyance Mr. Scanlan smiled at his own apt illustration.

His wife might have replied, that to throw away pounds like pebbles was more in his line; but she checked the sharp answer, and made none at all.

"I cannot imagine what is to be done," he continued. "If we had any relatives, any friends to whom I could have applied——"

"We have none, happily."

"Why do you say happily? But I know your crotchets on this head. You are totally mistaken, Josephine. Friends ought to help one another. Does not Scripture itself say, 'Give to him that asketh, and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away.'"

"But Scripture does not say, 'Go a borrowing, knowing all the while that you never can pay.'"

"Nonsense! We should pay in course of time."

“ We might, but I should be sorry to risk the experiment. No: fortunately for them and us, we have no friends.”

She spoke in such a measured, impassive voice, that Mr. Scanlan looked at her, uncertain whether she were in jest or earnest, pleased or vexed.

“ You are an odd kind of woman, Josephine; much more so than you used to be. I can’t understand you at all. But come, since my idea is scouted, what plan do you propose? I leave it all to you, for I am sick of the whole matter.” And he threw himself on the sofa with a weary and much injured air.

She sat down by him, and suggested a very simple scheme—selling some of her jewelry, which was valuable, and almost useless to her now. But she had reckoned without her host. The sacrifice which to Mrs. Scanlan had seemed trifling, to Mr. Scanlan appeared quite dreadful.

“ What! part with these lovely emeralds and diamonds, which have been so much admired,

and which make you look well-dressed, however careless you are in other ways? And sell them in Ditchley, that some neighbour may parade them before your very face, and proclaim to all the world how poor we are? Intolerable! I will never allow it; you must not think of such a thing."

But finding she still did think of it, he took another tack, and appealed to her feelings.

"I wonder at you! To sell my gifts, and my poor father's and mother's—the pretty things you used to look so sweet in when we were first married! Josephine, you must have the heart of a stone!"

"Have I?" cried she. "I almost wish I had."

And as her husband put his arm round her, she burst into tears; upon which he began to caress and coax her, and she to excuse him: thinking, after all, it was loving of him to wish not to part with these mementoes of old days.

"Oh! Edward," she said, leaning her head

against his shoulder, "we used to be so fond of one another."

"Used to be! I hope we are still. You are a very good wife to me, and I am sure I try to be a good husband to you. We should never have these differences at all, if you would only mind what I say, and not hold to your own opinion so firmly. Remember, the husband is head of the wife, and she must obey him."

Here Edward Scanlan assumed rather a lordly air, which he usually did when his Josephine was particularly humble. Like most men of his character, he resembled that celebrated nettle which, if you "tenderly touch it,"

"stings you for your pains;
But be like a man of mettle, and it soft as silk remains."

"It is no use, my dear," continued he; "you must give in to me a little more. The root of all our miseries is our being so poor, which we always shall be while we stick in the mud of Ditchley—this wretched country town, where I am not half appreciated. As I have so often said, we must remove to London."

Mrs. Scanlan drew back from him, turning so white that he was frightened.

"My dear, you are ill. Have a glass of wine. Bridget! Here, Bridget!"

"Don't call her. I need it not. And, besides, there is no wine in the house."

"Then there ought to be," returned Mr. Scanlan, angrily: for this too was a sore subject. He had been brought up in the old-fashioned school of considering stimulants a necessity. Old Mr. Scanlan used to imbibe his bottle of port a day, and young Mr. Scanlan his three or four glasses: which habit Josephine, accustomed to her father's French abstinence, had greatly disliked, and succeeded in breaking him off from just in time, before their changed circumstances required him to do so as a point of economy. He did it cheerfully enough, for he was no drunkard; still, he sometimes went back to the old leaven, enjoyed and envied the wine at other men's tables, and grumbled sorely at the want of it at his own.

"I tell you what, Josephine, I won't stand

this miserable penury any longer. That a man like me should be hidden in this hole of a place, deprived of every comfort of life, and hindered from taking his rightful position in the world, is a very great shame. It must be somebody's fault or other."

"Whose?"

At the flash of her eyes his own fell.

"Not yours, my dear; I never meant to accuse you of it. Nor the children's—though it is an uncomfortable fact that a man with a family is much more hampered, and kept back in the world, than a man who has none. Still, they can't help it, poor little things! But I am sure it would be a great deal better for them, and even for you, if we had a wider sphere. We *must* go and live in London."

But he said "must" very doubtfully, being aware of his wife's mind on the subject.

This bone of contention had been thrown between the husband and wife by Mr. Summerhayes, the artist. He had persuaded Edward Scanlan, who was easily enough persuaded by

anybody, that his great talents for preaching were entirely wasted in the provinces ; that if he came to the metropolis, and rented a proprietary chapel, crowds would flock to hear him : Irish eloquence being so highly appreciated. He would soon become as popular in London as he had been in Dublin, and derive a large income from his pew-rents, besides being in a much more independent position as preacher in a licensed Church of England chapel, than as curate of a country parish. At the time, Josephine had been able to reason the scheme out of his head, showing him that the whole thing was a matter of chance, built upon premises which probably did not exist, and running certain risks for very uncertain benefits. Her arguments were so strong that, with his usual habit of agreeing with the last speaker, her husband had agreed with her—at first : still he went back and back upon the project : and whenever he was restless, or sick, or dissatisfied, brought it up again—using all the old complainings, and old inducements, just as if she had

never set them aside ; proving, with that clear common sense of hers, that such a project was worse than imprudent—all but insane. Still, by this time she had ceased to argue ; she simply held her peace—and her own opinion.

“We must *not* go to London, Edward. It would be utter ruin to both me, the children, and yourself.”

“Ay, there it is,” returned he, bitterly ; “‘me’ first, the children second, your husband last—always last.”

This form of her speech had been purely accidental, and if it sprung from an underlying truth, that truth was unrecognised by herself. So, naturally, her whole soul sprang up indignant at her husband’s injustice.

“I do not think of myself first ; that is not my way—not any mother’s way. My whole life is spent for you and the children, and you know it. I am right in what I say. And I will not have my poor lambs carried away from here, where at least we have bread to eat, and one or two people who care for us, and taken up

to London to starve. I *will not*, Edward."

She spoke so loudly that Adrienne put her little anxious face in at the parlour-door, asking "if Mama called ?"

Then the mother came to her right senses at once.

"No, my darling," she whispered, putting the child out, and shutting the door after her. "Run away ; Papa and I are busy talking."

Then she turned, saying gently,

"Husband, I beg your pardon."

"You have need," said he, grimly.

But he was not of a grim nature, and when she further made concessions, he soon came round.

"Nevertheless," she said, when they were quite reconciled. "I hold to my point. I cannot consent to this scheme of yours, or rather of Mr. Summerhayes'."

"You are very unjust—you always were—to my friend Summerhayes. He is a capital fellow, worth any number of the stupid folk of Ditchley—associations quite unfitted for a man like

me. But if you will have me thrown away—bury your husband all his life down here, like a diamond in a dung-hill—why, take your way! Only you must also take the consequences."

"I will!" she said.

And then her heart smote her once more. She had been so furious, Edward so good-tempered, and he had yielded to her so completely, that her generous nature recoiled from accepting what seemed such a sacrifice from him to her. She could not have done it, were there only herself to think of. But—those six children! And a vision rose up before her of London as she had seen it, only once in her life—passing through from Ireland to Ditchley;—ghastly London, where, in the midst of splendour, people can so easily die of want. As, supposing her husband were unsuccessful, her poor little children might die. No, she could not consent. Besides, what use would it be if she did? They had no money whatsoever, not even enough to pay the expenses of the journey.

Still, remorse for her hardness towards him

made her listen patiently to another scheme of Mr. Scanlan's, which many a time he had tried vainly to persuade her to ; namely, asking Mr. Oldham for an increase of salary.

"I quite deserve it," said the Curate. "I do all the work, and he has all the pay. My income is hundreds to his thousands. I wonder by the way how large his income is, and who will drop in for it ? His property is considerable ; but he is as stingy as all rich men are. He would drive a bargain, and stick to it to the very last."

"I see no harm in sticking to a bargain, if it is not an unfair one," said Josephine, smiling. "Nor do I think Mr. Oldham so very stingy. Think how kind he is to the children."

"The children, pooh ! Has he ever been kind to me ? Has he ever fairly appreciated my abilities, and the sacrifice I make in continuing to be his curate, when I might so easily—— But I won't vex you, my dear ; I'll never refer to that subject again."

Nevertheless he did ; being one of those peo-

ple who cannot take “No” for an answer, or believe that “Yes” implies a decision ; but are always trusting to the chance of other people being as weak and undecided as themselves.

At last, partly in a kind of despair, and partly because she really saw some justice in the thing, Mrs. Scanlan consented that the Rector should be appealed to for more salary.

But who should “bell the cat ?” a rather unpleasant business.

“I think you would do it best, my dear ; women are cleverer at these things than men, and you are such an extraordinarily clever woman.”

Josephine smiled at the “blarney,” which she was not quite deaf to yet; seeing it was the blarney of affection. And her husband did feel great affection for her at that minute. She had saved him from a difficulty ; she had consented to what he wanted, and he was really grateful to her, with that shallow gratitude for small mercies and deep sensibility to temporary reliefs, which formed part of his *insouciant* disposition.

And then she paused to think the matter over. It was not her business certainly, but her husband's; still, as he said, she would probably manage it best. Mr. Oldham was rather difficult to deal with; Edward might vex him and spoil all. At any rate, he disliked the burthen of doing it; and most of his burthens had gradually fallen upon her, till her delicate shoulders had grown hardened to the weight. How many another woman has been driven to the same lot, and then blamed for tacitly accepting it; ridiculed as masculine, strong-minded—the “grey mare,” which is called contemptuously the “better horse.” And why? Because she is the better horse.

(While I say this, a firm arm holds me, and a tender voice suggests that I am talking nonsense. But I cannot be calmly judicial on this head. I know, and he who holds me knows too, that it is the truth I speak; forced on me by the remembrance of the sad life of my dear Lady de Bougainville.)

“Come, my darling,” said Edward Scanlan,

caressingly. “Please go to the Rectory and do this difficult business. You will do it so beautifully—a thousand times better than I. For you have a way of doing and saying anything so as to offend nobody. Never was there a truer proverb: ‘One man may steal a sheep while another mayn’t look over the hedge.’”

“And so you want me to go and steal your sheep for you?” said Josephine, laughing, and clinging to her husband fondly, in that vain hoping against hope which had so often beguiled her—that if he were a richer he would be both a happier and a better man; and that, whether or no, her continuing to love him would help him to become all she wished him to be. “Well, I will try to get you out of this difficulty, and, perhaps, things may be easier for the future. I will go and speak to Mr. Oldham to-morrow.”

CHAPTER V.

THAT to-morrow, of which Josephine Scanlan spoke so calmly, turned out to be the crisis of her life.

To make up her mind to this visit to the Rectory, cost some pain. It was like assuming her husband's duty ; doing for him what he was too weak to do for himself ; and, though many a woman is compelled to do this, still it is only a mean sort of woman who enjoys the doing of it, or likes being made perforce a heroine because her husband is a coward.

Ay, that was the key-note of Edward Scanlan's nature. He was a moral coward. Physically, perhaps, he had the bravery of most Irishmen ; would have faced the cannon's mouth ; indeed, it was always his regret that he had not

been a soldier instead of a clergyman. But to say No to an evil or unworthy request; to enter an elegant drawing-room in a shabby coat; in short, to do anything awkward, unpleasant, or painful, was to him quite impossible—as impossible as it would have been to his wife to go away and leave it undone.

She knew this well; it had been forced upon her through years of bitter experience, and, therefore, she nerved herself to undergo her double humiliation: that of asking a favour which might not be granted, and of reading, in the Rector's shrewd eyes, though he might be too courteous to say it, the knowledge that her husband, and not she, was the person who ought to have come and asked it. She knew, too, that all sorts of common-sense questions might be put to her. Why could they not make ends meet?—other people did, who were no better off than they, and had as many children. Perhaps, too, even Mr. Oldham would side with the opinions of the other two men—Mr. Scanlan and Mr. Summerhayes—against her, only a

woman ! and recommend that they should try to better themselves by seeking their fortune in London.

Seeking one's fortune ! A bright, bold, happy thing to do—for a young woman with her young husband, in whom she has full faith, and for whom she is ready to give up everything and follow him cheerfully, in weal or woe, throughout the world. Ten years ago, Josephine Scanlan would have done it gladly, with the Edward Scanlan whom she then believed in. Now ?

She could not do it ; she dared not. With those six little ones entrusted to her charge ; sent to her by God himself, to be her crown of comfort, to keep her heart warm, and open a dim vista of joy in the heavy future, which otherwise might have closed blankly upon her like the dead wall of a cave—no, it was impossible.

The thought of them, and this only alternative of saving them from what she felt would be utter ruin, beat down the cruel feeling of

shame which came upon her whenever she considered how she should speak to Mr. Oldham—into what words she should put the blunt request, “Give me some more money?”

For she knew that, in degree, her husband was right; the Rector was rather hard in the matter of money. That is, where he did give, he gave liberally enough, but he disliked being encroached upon, or applied to unnecessarily; and he was so exceedingly accurate himself in all his pecuniary affairs that he had a great contempt for inaccuracy in others. He had, too, on occasion, the power of making people a little afraid of him; and, brave woman as she was, I think Mrs. Scanlan must have been slightly afraid, too—conscious of that sensation which children call “their courage slipping down to the heels of their shoes”—as she sat, lacing her poor, half-worn, nay, shabby boots, on her delicate feet, the morning she had to walk down to the Rectory.

It was a burning hot morning in the middle June. I can picture her, for I know exactly

how she was dressed. She had on her usual print gown, with a tippet of nankeen, and a gipsy hat, such as was then the fashion, of coarse black and white straw. She used to plait this straw herself, and make it into hats for her own use and for the children—large, shady, and comfortable, tied across the crown and under the chin with green riband. Her costume was, perhaps, not quite matronly enough, but it suited her circumstances; the lilac print gown washed for ever; the hat was much more convenient than the gigantic bonnets, heavy with feathers and flowers, which were then in vogue, and much more economical besides. With her stately gait and still slender girlish figure, upon which almost anything looked well, I have little doubt, though the Ditchley ladies who met her that day might have set her down as dressed rather oddly and unfashionably, there was something about Mrs. Scanlan's appearance which marked her unmistakeably as “the gentlewoman.”

She walked quickly across the common, and through the town, for she wanted to get rid of some ugly thoughts which oppressed her ; and besides, whenever a difficulty had to be met, it was her nature to meet it as soon as possible. “If I had to be hanged,” she would say, “I would rather be hanged at once. Reprieves are intolerable.”

It was not often she quitted her own house for other people’s now. For months she had not been inside the pretty Rectory, and the sight of it in all its summer beauty aroused old remembrances and vain desires. Desires, not for herself, but for those belonging to her. Had she been alone, she almost thought she would have lived on for ever at Wren’s Nest, dilapidated and dreary though it was growing. But—her children. It was now most difficult to stow them all away within those narrow walls ; and as for making them really comfortable there, the thing could not be done at all.

She counted them over, her pretty flock :—manly César, delicate Adrienne, Louis, who

bade fair to be the cleverest of the tribe, Gabrielle growing up with all the health and beauty that her elder sister lacked ; Martin and Catherine, baby nonentities still, but fast turning into individualities, like the rest, for the mother's character had impressed itself upon every one of her children. They were not commonplace at all, but had each strong wills and decided tastes. Poor little souls ! How hard it would be to repress their dawning talents and aspirations, to bring them up little better than labourers' children, for so it must be—how could it be different ? She did not know where even food and clothing were to come from, to say nothing of education. Oh ! if she only had a little money ; merely the crumbs from the rich man's table—the merest tithe of that wealth which Mr. Oldham spent so carelessly upon this his garden, his conservatories, his beautiful and tasteful house.

She began to think that after all her husband was right in his complaints against fate ; that blessings were very unfairly divided, especially

money ; and that it was hard this childless old bachelor should have so much, and she and her poor young tribe so little. Did the good God look with equal eyes on all ? Did He see how she suffered ? Was it any use to call upon Him, and ask Him to help her ? Not in one of those voluminous and voluble prayers which her husband poured out night and morning, to the phraseology of which she had grown so accustomed, that now it all went in at one ear and out at the other. She either never listened at all, or listened with a slight curl of the lip, incredulous both as to the prayer itself, and, God help her, to the Hearer of it also.

Blameworthy she might be—ay, she was. She ought to have been Christian enough to judge between the sham and the reality ; wise enough to know that all the musty human curtains hung between may darken the soul's daylight, but can never blot out the existence of the sun, the great Sun of Righteousness, who shines for ever above and upon us all. But she was also deeply to be pitied ; for the man who

made this woman half an unbeliever, stood to her in the closest relation that one human being can stand to another, the ruler of her life, the centre of her world, her priest, her lord, her husband.

Usually she was too busy, from hour to hour, and from minute to minute, for these ill thoughts to come ; thoughts which, beginning in lack of faith in man, ended in lack of faith towards God : but to-day, in her long, lonely, fatiguing walk, the devil had had full opportunity to attack her. She felt his cruel black wings flapping behind her at every step she took, and she flung the Rectory gate after her with a clang, hoping in that pleasant, peaceful garden to shut him out, but he would come in. He seemed to jeer at her from under the faded laburnums, and behind the syringa bushes—those mock orange-blossoms, with their faint, sickly smell, sweet at first, but afterwards growing painful to the sense. They reminded her of many marriages, which begin so bright at first, and end, God knows how ! Marriages in which

nobody is particularly to blame, and of which the only thing to be said is that they were altogether a mistake—a sad mistake.

“But nobody knows it, and nobody ought to know,” said to herself this thirteen-years’ wife—apropos of nothing external, as she walked on in her rare solitude, thinking she would give herself and the devil no more opportunities of the same sort again, and forcibly turning her mind away from other things to the special thing she had that morning to do.

She found Mr. Oldham, not in his study, as she expected, but sitting in his verandah. The day was so hot, and his book so uninteresting, that he had fallen asleep in his arm-chair. As she came suddenly upon him thus, he looked so withered and wasted, such a forlorn specimen of a solitary old bachelor, with not a creature to care for him, not a soul to heed whether he was alive or dead, that the wife and mother, who a moment before had been bitterly envying him, now felt a sensation of pity. Her own full, bright home, alive with little voices, and

this lonely house and silent garden, where the bees and the birds went on with their humming and singing, as heedless of the old man as if he were not asleep, but dead—struck her with forcible contrast, and reproached her unconsciously for all she had been thinking of so bitterly.

She had no time to think more, for Mr. Oldham woke; and apologised, in some confusion, for being so discovered.

“But I really do not believe I was asleep, madame; I was only meditating. At my age one has plenty of time for meditation. You, I suppose, have very little?”

“None at all.” And the idea of her sitting down only for ten minutes idle with a book in her hand quite amused Mrs. Scanlan.

The old man seemed much pleased to see her, brought her an arm-chair as comfortable as his own, and thanked her warmly for taking such a long, hot walk, just to pay him a neighbourly visit.

“It is very kind of you—very kind indeed;

and you are most welcome too. I am so much alone."

His courteous gratitude smote her conscience painfully. Colouring, almost with shame, she said at once, blurting it out in a confused way, very unlike her ordinary sweet and stately manner,—

" You must not thank me too much, Mr. Oldham, or I shall feel quite a hypocrite. I am afraid my visit te-day was not at all disinterested, in the sense you put it. I had something which I particularly wished to speak to you about."

" I shall be most happy," returned the Rector; and then, noticing how far from happy his visitor still looked, he added, " My dear lady, make yourself quite at ease. I like your plain-speaking, even though it does take down an old man's vanity a little. How could I expect you, a busy mother of a family, to waste your valuable time in inquiring after the health of a stupid old bachelor like me? "

" Have you been ill? I did not know."

"Nobody did, except Waters ; I hate to be gossipped about, as you are aware. I think, Mrs. Scanlan, you and I understand one another pretty well by this time?"

"I hope so," she said, smiling, and taking the hint, asked no more questions about his illness.

She noticed that he looked a little worn, and his hands were "shaky," but he was as polite and kind as usual—rather more so, indeed.

"Come, then, we will sit and talk here, and afterwards we will go and look at my roses... I have the finest Banksia you ever saw, just coming into flower."

Banksia roses! and the bitter business that she had to speak about! It was a hard contrast for the Curate's wife; but she made a violent effort, and began. Once begun, it was less difficult to get through with; the Rector helping her by his perfect, yet courteous silence; never interrupting her by word or look till she got to the end of her tale, and had made, in as brief language as she could put it, her humiliating request.

Then he raised his eyes and looked at her—inquiringly, as it seemed, but satisfied ; looked away again—and sat drawing patterns on the gravel-walk with his stick.

“What you tell me, Mrs. Scanlan, you probably think I was unacquainted with, but I am not. Your husband has broached the matter to me several times ; he did it a week ago, and I gave him an answer—a direct refusal.”

“A direct refusal ! And he never told me ! He allowed me to come and ask you again !”

For a moment Josephine’s indignation had got the better of her prudence.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Oldham,” added she, rising at once. “I perceive I ought not to have come here at all. But Mr. Scanlan said——”

She stopped. It was not always safe to repeat what Mr. Scanlan said, without some confirmatory or secondary evidence.

“Mr. Scanlan probably said a great many unnecessary things, as a man does when he is annoyed—and I fear I annoyed him very much

that day. But you must pardon me, madame. Your husband is a young man, and he ought to put up a little with an old man like me. So ought you. My dear lady, will you not sit down again, and let us talk the matter quietly over?"

She obeyed, though it went against her grain, sorely. But the Rector was, as he said, an old man, and he had been very kind to her and her children. She believed him to be really her friend—in fact, the only friend she had; since forlorn wives, whom the world supposes well protected, are, consequently, the most friendless women alive. Their one stay failing them, they can have no substitute; they must acquire strength enough to stand alone—or drop.

"Mr. Scanlan told me, of course, of the alternative—the fatal alternative, for me"—(here it was difficult to distinguish whether Mr. Oldham meant truth or satire)—"that if his income were not increased he would have to go at once to reside in London. It seems he has admirable prospects there?"

This last sentence, which, though stated as a fact, sounded more like a query, was met by Mrs. Scanlan with a dead silence. In truth, she was so surprised at finding all these things, upon which her husband had bound her to secrecy, divulged by him to the very last person she expected he would have told them to, that she could not find a word to say.

"Or else," pursued Mr. Oldham, "he thinks he has great prospects, which, in a person of my friend Scanlan's enthusiastic temperament, comes to the same thing. But in such important matters, I always prefer having the lady's opinion likewise. What do you say? Is it your wish to leave Ditchley?"

"No. Decidedly no."

The old man looked pleased.

"I am glad of that. I should be sorry, madame, if after all these years you liked us so little that you were glad to run away. And besides, I cannot feel that there are such vital objections to Ditchley. It is a pretty neighbourhood, with good society, a healthy place for

children, and all that. Why should you go to London?"

" My husband wishes it."

" Yes, I remember he said he would be better appreciated there; would attract large congregations; get into the aristocratic evangelical set, and so on. He might; he is a clever man, and a most—ahem!—most popular preacher. But at the same time, he might not. As I told him, it is just a chance; and if the chance fails, where is he? Also, where are you and the children?"

Mr. Oldham spoke in such a practical, kindly, common-sense way, having evidently taken in the position and thought it over, in a way that people seldom trouble themselves to think over their friends' affairs—that Mrs. Scanlan was a little relieved. He had not been offended evidently, whatever unpleasant talk had passed between him and her husband. She felt extremely grateful to the old man, and expressed her gratitude warmly.

" No, no. You have nothing to thank me

for ; it is quite the other way. And I looked forward to having the pleasure of your society, and my friend Scanlan's, for some years—in fact till my years are done. It would be a great regret to me if you had to leave Ditchley."

"And to me also. In which," added she, recollecting herself, "I am sure my husband would join. He would hesitate very much at giving up his curacy. But necessity has no law." For it seemed as if the object of her visit were slipping away, so she forcibly brought herself back to the point. "It all comes to this, Mr. Oldham : we cannot live upon the income we have from you, and we have no other, not a halfpenny but what you give us."

"Indeed ? I feared so, but I never was quite sure of it. You must have a sore pull sometimes. Poor lady !"

He just touched her hand, with which she had grasped the arm of his chair. What a thin hand it was ! and marked with traces of toil, not usually seen on a lady's hand.

Mrs. Scanlan drew it away at once.

"I do not complain," she said, rather proudly. "I shall make ends meet if I can, but just this year I have been unable to do it, and I feel quite miserable. Do you know, we actually owe fifteen pounds!"

"Fifteen pounds; what an alarming sum!" said the Rector, smiling.

"Not to you, perhaps; but to me it is alarming. It makes me shrink from going through Ditchley High Street. I think all men's eyes must be upon me. 'There is the clergyman's wife, she owes money, and she can't pay, or won't pay;' for how do they know which it is? Oh! Mr. Oldham, you may think lightly of it, but to me it is dreadful—intolerable!"

She spoke earnestly; almost with the tears in her eyes. It was so long since her heart had been opened to anybody, that once beginning to speak, she could not stop herself.

"You see, I never was used to this sort of thing. My father,—ah! if you had known my father! He would have gone hungry—many a time we have both gone hungry—but to go into

debt ! we would have shuddered at such a thing. Yea, you should have known my father," she repeated, and her tears began to start.

"I have never named the circumstance to you, madame, because it was not necessary," said Mr. Oldham gently ; " but once in Paris, at the marriage of Mademoiselle his sister, whom I had met before, and much admired, I had the honour of seeing, for five minutes only, Monsieur le Vicomte de Bougainville."

Greatly astonished, but still unwilling to put questions which Mr. Oldham had evidently no intention of answering—indeed he seemed exceedingly to dislike the subject—Mrs. Scanlan sat silent ; and the next moment the butler appeared, announcing lunch.

" You will allow me ?" said the Rector, offering her his arm. " After luncheon we shall have an opportunity of talking over our little business."

The Curate's wife roused herself to necessary courtesy, and her courage, which had been slowly ebbing away, faintly revived. During

the meal, she and Mr. Oldham conversed together in their usual pleasant way : on his favourite hobbies, his garden, and so on ; nay, he paid her every attention that he could think of, even sending for a bottle of his most precious Burgundy, in celebration, he said, of the rare honour of having her for his guest. His kindness comforted her even more than his wine.

Besides—alas ! for poor mortality—to her, faint from her hot walk, this plentiful meal, more luxurious than any dinner she had had for months ; and the peaceful eating of it, surrounded by the quiet atmosphere of wealthy ease, affected her with a sensation of unaccustomed pleasantness. She had never cared for luxuries when she had them : but now, in her long lack of them, they seemed to have acquired an adventitious value. She almost wished she had a beggar's wallet, and a beggar's cool effrontery, that she might take a portion of the delicately-cooked dinner home to her children, especially her sickly Adrienne ; and she gazed

round the large, cool, airy dining-room with an unconscious sigh.

“ You seem to admire this room,” said Mr. Oldham, smiling.

“ Yes, I always did, you know. The Rectory is, to my mind, the prettiest house in Ditchley. And I have a weakness for all pretty things.”

“ So have I. And sometimes I think I might indulge it even more than I do; in collecting pictures, for instance. But where would be the good of this? to an old bachelor like me, who cannot, at best, enjoy them long; and at my death they would be all dispersed. No, no; I have made up my mind to keep to my old plain ways, and leave extravagance for those that will come after me.”

It was the first time Mr. Oldham had ever openly reverted to his heir or heirs. Of course they existed: rich men have always a tribe of seventeenth cousins and so on, eager to drop in for what may be left them; but none such had ever appeared at Ditchley. The town and neighbourhood seemed as ignorant on the sub-

ject as Mrs. Scanlan ; in fact, the general opinion was, that Mr. Oldham meant to leave all his money to some charitable institution. He was, she knew, the last of his family—a sad thing in itself, and not a pleasant topic to speak upon with him ; so she tried to turn the current of conversation by some common-place remark ; hoping that “ those which came after him ” would long be kept out of their inheritance.

“ Thank you. However, when they do come into it, they will find it safe and sure. I take a good while to make up my mind, but having once made it up, I rarely change it. My heirs may count securely upon their property.”

It was an odd remark, and Josephine was puzzled how to reply to it. Of course, it showed Mr. Oldham’s friendly spirit towards herself and her interest in his affairs, thus to speak of them to her ; but her own business was too near her heart, and she was pardonably indifferent as to who might or might not inherit Mr. Oldham’s money. The humble fortunes of herself and her family were of much more import-

ance to her just then. Still, she would not force the conversation ; but she waited with nervous impatience for her host to quit the dining-room, and lead the way into his study.

He did so at length ; though even when there he settled himself in his chair, and pointed to her to take another, without testifying any immediate intention of beginning the subject which lay so close to her heart.

“Do you ever think of dying, Mrs. Scanlan ?”

It was an odd question, odd even to ludicrousness, but she restrained her inclination to see it in that light, and said gravely—

“In a religious point of view, do you mean, Mr. Oldham ?”

“No ; a worldly one. Do you consider yourself likely to have a long life ?”

“My family were all long-lived, and I am myself, so far as I know, a very healthy person. Yes ; I hope I shall live to see all my children grown up. God grant it !”

She slightly sighed. For, when in her last

crisis of motherhood she had a nearer risk of her life than ordinary, it had struck her—what if she were to die, leaving those poor little ones of hers with no shelter, no protection against the hard world, except their father? And since that time she had taken especial care of her own health, and striven hard against a weary longing for rest that sometimes came over her, praying that she might be forgiven for it, and not allowed to die until she was quite an old woman, or until her children needed her no more.

"My life is in God's hands," she resumed, "but, humanly speaking, I see no reason why it should not be a long one. I trust it will be, for my children's sake, and my husband's."

"Your husband is less strong than you; at least, he always tells me so. When he gets into a melancholy mood, he says he shall never live to be my age."

"I think he will, though," replied Mrs. Scanlan cheerfully, "especially if he has no very hard work, and resides always in the country.

Which is one of my strong reasons for disliking to remove to London."

"Stay: we will enter upon that matter presently. Just now I wish to speak to you about —what I did not at first mean to tell you, but have decided that it is better I should—some private affairs of my own. A secret, in short. I know that you can keep a secret."

Mrs. Scanlan bent her head assentingly, wondering what on earth was coming next. Surely, she thought, it is not possible that the old man is going to be married! He was seventy-five, at least; yet such things do happen, even to septuagenarians. But his next sentence removed this doubt.

"It is a secret that you will have to keep for some time—possibly several years. And you must keep it implicitly and entirely. You must not even tell it to your husband."

"Not tell my husband!" cried Josephine, drawing back. "Then I think, Mr. Oldham, you had better not confide it to me at all. It is exceedingly difficult—not to enter upon the

question of whether it is right or wrong—for any wife to keep a secret from her husband."

"May be; I have never had the advantage of being married, and am certainly not likely now to risk the experiment. But still, in the matter of Mrs. Waters you did not tell your husband."

"That was different," said she, hesitating.

"Nevertheless—here the case stands. Either you must promise not to communicate this fact to your husband, or I cannot confide it to you. And it is important—indeed, of the most vital importance—that you should know it."

The Rector spoke decidedly, with that decision which, whenever he chose to exercise it, she was aware was inflexible. He did not care to fight about small things, but in great ones, when his mind was made up, you might as well attempt to move a mountain as Mr. Oldham.

"It is a secret," continued he, "which is exclusively mine; which would do Scanlan no good to learn, and might do him considerable harm. The greatest kindness I can show him,

I honestly believe, is to keep it from him."

"Then why tell it to me?"

"Because you are another sort of a person. It could not possibly harm you, and might be useful to you in some degree—you and the children. I advise you to hear it, if only for the sake of the children."

"I hate mysteries," said Mrs. Scanlan uneasily, and turning over in her mind what this secret of the Rector's could possibly be; was it any difficulty between him and his bishop, in which Mr. Scanlan was also concerned? Or was it—this suggestion occurred to her as most probable—something relating to Mr. Scanlan's future; perhaps his chance of the next presentation to the living of Ditchley, on Mr. Oldham's decease? The Rector's next words confirmed her in this idea.

"I hate mysteries, too, madame, unless they are quite unavoidable, as this is. I ask from you a plain Yes or No; nor can I give you any more information to influence you on the matter, except that when you know my secret, I

believe, I am almost sure, that you will not think it necessary to go and live in London."

The temptation was sore. "Oh! Mr. Oldham," she said piteously, "why do you try me so hard?"

"I do it for your own good. Do you think I don't feel for you, my poor girl?" and his tone was almost paternal in its kindness. "But the circumstances of the case are quite inevitable. Either you must accept my secret, and keep it from your husband, and from every human being during my lifetime, or I shall consider the conditions void; and all things shall be as if they had never been."

"I do not understand——"

"There is no necessity that you should understand. Only, will you trust me? Have I not always been a good friend to you? Can you not believe that I shall remain so to the last? And I give you my honour—the honour of the last of the Oldhams"—added he with a sort of proud pathos, that went right to the heart of this mother of a rising race, "that what

I ask of you will never trouble you, or grieve you, or compromise you in the smallest degree. It is *my* secret. I might have kept it from you to the last, only," with an air of amused benevolence, "I think you will be the better for hearing it. I think, too, that Scanlan himself would urge you to accept my conditions, if he knew."

"Let me tell him," pleaded the wife. "Let me just tell my husband that there is a secret, which he must allow me to keep, even from himself, for the present."

Mr. Oldham shook his head. "You Quixotic woman! You are like Charity, that 'believeth all things, hopeth all things.' But I know better. No, no. Don't mistake me. I like Scanlan very much. He is a clever fellow; a pleasant fellow; he suits me as a curate. I never wish to part from him. Still, my dear lady, you do not require me to tell you that—that—" he hesitated, "Mrs. Scanlan is a very superior person to her husband."

Poor Mr. Oldham! in his ignorant bachelor-

hood, he had not a suspicion of the effect his compliment would produce.

The blood rushed violently into Josephine's face ; she drew herself up with a haughtiness which he had never before seen.

"Sir !—Mr. Oldham !—you cannot surely mean what you are saying. Let us dismiss this subject, and confine ourselves entirely to the matter in hand—the matter my husband sent me to discuss with you. May we enter upon it at once ? for I must go home to my children."

Mr. Oldham regarded her a moment, and then held out his hand almost humbly.

"Pardon, madame. I was forgetting myself, and speaking to you as if you were my daughter. You almost might have been. I was once in love with a lady very like you."

There was a slight twitch in the withered face, and the momentary emotion passed. Who the "lady" was, Mrs. Scanlan did not, of course, ask him. Years afterwards she had reason to think it might have been her aunt, that beautiful

Mademoiselle Josephine de Bougainville who died young, soon after her marriage, which had been a marriage *de convenance*; but the real facts, buried far back in long forgotten years, Josephine never inquired into, and never learnt.

“The matter in hand, as you termed it,” resumed Mr. Oldham, “is easily settled. I like you, I like your husband. I wish him to remain my curate as long as I live. Therefore, tell me how much income you think necessary for your comfort, and you shall have it. Give me my cheque-book there, state your sum, and we will arrange the matter at once. And now, may I tell you my secret?”

Mrs. Scanlan had listened in wondering thankfulness, too great for words; but now she recoiled. Evidently the old man was bent upon his point, and upon exacting his conditions to the letter. Her strait was very hard. The simple duty of a wife—to hide nothing from her husband; to hear nothing that she will require to hide—Josephine never doubted for a moment; but hers was an exceptional case.

She knew well 'enough, and was convinced the Rector knew, that Edward Scanlan was the last man in the world to be trusted with a secret. At least, so she should have said to him had he been any other man than her husband—and did his being her husband alter the facts of the case, or her judgment upon it ? We may be silent concerning the weak points of our nearest and dearest ; but to ignore them, to be wilfully blind to them, to refuse to guard against them, is, to any prudent and conscientiously-minded person, clearly impossible.

Could it be that in refusing the Rector's conditions, which her judgment told her he, who knew her husband's character as well as she did, was warranted in exacting, she was straining at gnats and swallowing camels ? setting up a sham eidolon of wifely duty, and sacrificing to it the interests of her whole family, including her husband's ?

“ Are you sure it will never harm him ; that he will never blame me for doing this ? ”

“ Scanlan blame you ? Oh ! no. Quite im-

possible," answered the Rector, with a slight curl of the lip. "I assure you, you may quiet all apprehensions on that score. He will consider it the best thing that you could possibly do for him."

Yet still poor Josephine hesitated. That clear sense of the right, which had always burnt in her heart with a steady flame, seemed flickering to and fro, turned and twisted by side winds of expediency. The motto of the De Bougainville family, "*Fais ce que tu dois, advenne que pourra,*" rung in her ears with a mocking iteration. In her girlhood she had obeyed it always, had dared everything, doubted nothing. Could wifehood and motherhood have made her less honourable, less brave?

"Come," said Mr. Oldham, "this is too important a matter for you to give, or me to take, a rash answer. There is a blank cheque, fill it up as you think fair. And meantime go into the garden and look at my roses, just for a quarter of an hour."

With gentle force he led her to the French

window of his study, handed her through and closed it behind her, shutting her out alone in the sunshiny garden.

Therein she wandered about for fully the prescribed time. What inward struggle she went through, who can know? Whether she was able to satisfy herself that she was doing right; that circumstances justified what, in most other women's case, would actually be wrong, and she would have been the first to pronounce wrong—who can tell? Or, perhaps, goaded on by the necessities of her hard lot, she deliberately set aside the question of whether her act was right or wrong, and was determined to do it—for her children's sake. If anything could turn a woman into a thief, a murderer, a sinner of any sort, I think it would be for the love of, or the terror for, her children.

I do not plead for Josephine Scanlan, I only pity her. And I feel—ay, I feel it even with my own husband's honest eyes looking into mine—that, had my lot been hers, I should have acted exactly the same.

She came back to Mr. Oldham.

“ Well, my dear lady, have you decided ? ”

“ Yes. You may tell me anything you like, and so long as you live I will keep your secret faithfully.”

“ As you did Mrs. Waters’s ? ”

“ That was a different matter ; but I will keep your secret too—even from my husband.”

“ Thank you.” And Mr. Oldham shook her hand warmly. “ You shall never regret the—the sacrifice.”

But now that he had her promise, he seemed in no hurry to claim it. He finished writing out a cheque, putting in a sum a little beyond that which she had named, and then taking up his hat and stick, composedly accompanied her round the garden, pointing out his favourite flowers and his various improvements.

“ That Banksia rose, is it not fine ? I shall train it all over the verandah. Indeed, I have thought of making a proper rosery, or rosearium ; but it would be expensive, and is hardly worth while, since the Rectory comes into other

hands at my death. Oldham Court, however, will be the property of my successor—and a very fine property it is—quite unencumbered. My heirs might run through it in no time ; however I shall take care to prevent that. My friend and executor, Dr. Waters, and my lawyer, are both remarkably acute, firm, and honourable men."

"Oh yes," replied poor Josephine, answering at random, for her patience was at its last gasp. But still Mr. Oldham went on talking—she scarcely heard what—about everything except the important secret ; and not until the very last minute, when he had let her out at the gate and stood leaning against it, still conversing with her, and regarding her in a tender, wistful sort of way, did he refer to what he had to tell.

"I am laying on you a heavy burthen, you think, Mrs. Scanlan ? Perhaps it is so. But be easy, you may not have to bear it very long. Only during my lifetime."

"That may be, I trust, many years."

“And possibly not one year. I had a slight seizure the other day, which made me arrange all my affairs. But do not speak of this. It is of no consequence. Go home now, and mind, what I have to tell you must make no difference there; everything must go on as heretofore. Only you need not come to me again looking the picture of despair, as you did to-day.”

“Well, I do not return in despair, thanks to your kindness. And on my next visit I will take care to put on my best looks, and bring a child or two with me to amuse myself and you. Shall I?”

“Certainly. Yours are charming children, and—” he added, becoming suddenly grave, “do not torment yourself any more about their future; it is not necessary. This is my secret—a very simple one. Yesterday I made my will, and I left you my heiress. Not a word. Adieu!”

He turned, and walked quickly back into his garden. Mrs. Scanlan stood, transfixed with

astonishment, at the Rectory gate; and then, there being nothing else left for her to do, she also turned and walked home.

CHAPTER VI.

JOSEPHINE SCANLAN walked home from the Rectory that afternoon, feeling like a woman in a dream.

At first she was so stunned by the tidings she had received that she did not realise her position. How strange!—how very strange! —to be the heiress of a man who in the course of nature could not possibly live many years, and might pass away any day—leaving behind him, for her and hers, at the least a very handsome competence, probably considerable wealth,—wealth enough to make her mind entirely at ease concerning the future of her children. Her bright, bold César, her sensitive Adrienne, and all her other darlings, loved, each as they came, with the infinitely divisible,

yet undivided love of a mother,—they would never have to suffer as she had suffered. Thank God !

This was her prominent thought. It came upon her gradually, deliciously, on leaving the garden-gate, where, quite overcome, she had stood ever so long under shelter of the great whitethorn tree : for years the sight and smell of the faint pinky blossoms of the fading may reminded her of the emotions of that hour. Slowly her confused mind settled into calmness, and she took in the full extent of all that had happened to her since morning, and the total change that had come to her lot.

Not externally. It was obvious that Mr. Oldham meant to make no public acknowledgment of his intentions with regard to her. Also, he was leaving his property to *herself*; he had said distinctly “my heiress,” never naming her husband. These two facts startled her. The Rector, with all his reticent politeness, was then an acuter man than she supposed, and had seen further than she thought he had into the

secrets of her married life, and the inner mysteries of her household. He had his own reasons—and her unwarped judgment told her they were natural and good ones—for exacting from her this promise, and requiring that the daily existence of the little family at Wren's Nest should go on as heretofore, and that Edward Scanlan should be told nothing whatever of the change that was likely to take place in his fortunes. It was best so. Edward Scanlan's wife knew that, fully as well as Mr. Oldham did.

Some may hold that she erred here in seeing with such clear vision her husband's faults. Can it be that in any relation of life, conjugal or otherwise, it is one's duty to shut one's eyes to facts, and do one's best to believe a lie? I think not. I think all righteous love partakes in this of the love of God—that it can "hate the sin and love the sinner;" that without deceiving itself for a moment as to the weak points of the object beloved, it can love on in spite of them; up to a certain limit, often a

very large limit, of endurance ; and that when love fails, this endurance still remains. Besides, mercifully, love gets into a habit of loving, not easily broken through. And Josephine had been married thirteen years.

In all those thirteen years she had never carried a lighter heart than that which seemed to leap in her bosom, as gradually she recognised the change that those few words of Mr. Oldham's had wrought in her thoughts, hopes, and plans, though all must necessarily be kept to herself, and not allowed to influence her outside life. Still, this was not so hard as it might once have been : she had been gradually forced into keeping many things to herself : it was useless, worse than useless, to speak of them to her husband. She always intuitively kept from him perplexing and vexatious things ; it would not be much more difficult to keep from him this good thing. Only for the present too : he would one day enjoy it all. And even now she brought back to him the welcome news of an addition to his salary ; large enough, she fondly be-

lieved, to make him fully satisfied and content.

She was quite content. Before she had walked half a mile, the morning's events had grown to her an unmixed good, in which she rejoiced without a single drawback. She had no hesitation whatever in accepting the unexpected heirship. Mr. Oldham had no near kindred who could look for anything from him; and, even if he had, could he not do as he liked with his own? He was an old bachelor: no one had any claims upon him; he was free to leave his property as he chose. Nor in her maternal vanity did Mrs. Scanlan much wonder at his choice. She herself was of course merely nominal. She might be quite elderly before the fortune came to her, but it would assuredly come to her children; and who that looked at her César, her Louis, would not be glad to leave a fortune to such boys? In her heart, the mother considered Mr. Oldham a wise man as well as a generous.

After taking a slight circuit by the river-side, just to compose her mind, she walked through

Ditchley town : walked with an erect bearing, afraid of meeting nobody. For was not the cheque in her pocket, and her future safe and sure ? No such humiliation as had happened lately would ever happen to her again. Had not the cheque been made out to her husband, and requiring his endorsement, she would have paid great part of it away on the spot—this “painfully honest” woman, as Mr. Scanlan sometimes called her. In the meantime, she went into every shop as she passed, and collected all her bills, saying she should go round and pay them early next morning.

Then she walked gaily across the common with her heart full of gratitude to both God and man. She felt kindly towards every creature living. A beggar whom she chanced to meet, she relieved with silver instead of copper, this time. And every neighbour she saw, instead of slipping away from, she stopped to speak to ; gave and accepted several invitations ; and talked and smiled so brightly, that more than one person told her how very well she was looking.

At which she did not wonder much ; she felt as if henceforward she should always be well ; as if her dark days were gone by for ever. We all have such seasons, and wonder at them when the dark days return again, as return they must : but they are very blessed at the time, and they leave a dim odour of happiness behind them which refreshes us more than we know.

When Mrs. Scanlan came to the door of her house—that small house in which she had lived so long, and might have to live—how much longer ?—the first that ran out to meet her was her little daughter.

“ Mamma, you bring good news ! ” cried the child, who was a wise child, and could already read, plain as a book, every expression of her mother’s face.

And then the mother recognised, for a moment like the touch of a thorn on her hand, the burthen which had been laid upon her, or rather which she had deliberately laid upon herself, in accepting Mr. Oldham’s secret and its condi-

tions. She did bring good news; yet, for the first time, she could not tell them, could not ask her family to rejoice with her, except to a very limited extent. For the first time she was obliged to prevaricate; to drop her conscious eyes before those of her own child—so clear, so earnest in their sympathy.

“Yes, my darling, I do bring good news. Mr. Oldham has been exceedingly kind. He has done what I wanted. We shall be quite rich now.”

For of course Adrienne knew of all of their troubles—so did Bridget—so did the whole family. They were troubles of a kind not easily disguised: and, besides, Mr. Scanlan was so incautious and careless in his talk before both servant and children, that to keep things concealed from either was nearly impossible. Mrs. Scanlan had tried to do it as much as she could, especially when César and Adrienne, growing up a big boy and girl, began to enter into their mother’s cares with a precocious anxiety painful to witness; but at last she gave up

the attempt in despair, and let matters take their chance. Better they should know everything than take garbled statements or false and foolish notions into their little heads. Were not the children's souls in the mother's hand?—she believed so.

“Yes, Adrienne, my pet, you need not fret any more. Mr. Oldham has increased Papa's salary: we must all be grateful to him, and do as much as ever we can for him to the end of his days.”

“Must we? Oh of course we will! But, mamma, if, as Papa has just been telling me, the Rector has paid him far too little, why need we be so exceedingly grateful? It is but fair.”

Mrs. Scanlan made no reply. Again the thorn pressed, and another, a much sharper pricking thorn, which wounded her sometimes. When the father could get no better company, he used to talk to the children, particularly to Adrienne, and often put into the little innocent minds ideas and feelings which took the mother

days and weeks to eradicate. She could not say plainly, "Your father has been telling you what is not true," or "Papa takes quite a mistaken idea of the matter, which is in reality so and so;" and all she could do was to trust to her own strong influence, and that of time, in silently working things round. That daringly self-reliant, and yet pathetic motto of Philip II., "Time and I against any two," often rung in the head of this poor, brave, lonely woman—forced into unnatural unwomanliness, until sometimes she almost hated herself, and thought, could she meet herself like any other person, Josephine Scanlan would have been the last person she would have cared to know!

"Adrienne, we will not discuss the question of fairness just now. Enough that Mr. Oldham is a very good man, whom both Papa and I exceedingly respect and like."

"I don't think Papa likes him; for he is always laughing at him and his oddities."

"We often laugh at people for whom we feel most kindly," said Mrs. Scanlan, formally, as if

enunciating a moral axiom ;—and then, while drawing the little thin arms round her neck, and noticing the prematurely eager and anxious face, the thought that her frail delicate flower would never be broken by the sharp blasts of poverty, came with such a tide of thankfulness that Josephine felt she could bear any other trouble now. Ay, even the difficult task of meeting her husband, and telling him only half that was in her mind : of having afterwards, for an indefinite time, to go on walking and talking, eating and sleeping beside him, carrying on their ordinary daily life, conscious every instant of the secret so momentous, which she dared not in the smallest degree betray.

Yet she was on the point of betraying it within the first half-hour.

Edward Scanlan had seized upon the cheque with the eagerness of a boy. One of the excuses his wife often made for him was, that in many things he was so very boy-like still : and could not be judged by the laws which regulate duty to a man, now considerably past thirty, a hus-

band and the father of a family,—for he seemed as if he had never been born to carry the weight of these “encumbrances.” Delightedly he looked at the sum, which represented to his sanguine mind an income of unlimited capacity. He began reckoning up all he wanted—for himself and the household; and had spent half the money already in imagination, while his wife was telling him how she had obtained it.

On this head, however, he was not inquisitive. It was obtained, and that was enough. He never noticed the blanks in her story, her many hesitations, her sad shamefacedness, and her occasional caresses, as if she wished to atone for some unconscious wrong done towards him, which her tender conscience could not help grieving for, even though he himself might neither feel it nor know it.

But when she told him of all she had done in Ditchley as she passed, and of the large sum she was to pay away the following morning, Mr. Scanlan was exceedingly displeased.

“What a ridiculous hurry you are in! As if

those impertinent fellows could not wait a little, after having bothered us so much. I've a great mind not to pay them for ever so long, only that would look so odd in a clergyman."

"Or in any man," said the wife quietly. "Here is the list of what we owe; we must think twice, you see, before we lay out the remainder."

"What, are you going to pay away all that money at once? Why, you might as well have brought me home nothing at all! We shall be none the better for Oldham's 'generosity,' as you call it. Generosity, indeed! When you were at it, Josephine, and he allowed you *carte blanche*, why in the world didn't you ask him for a little more?"

Josephine rose in warm indignation. "Ask him for more, when he has already given us so much? When he is going to give us——"

Everything, she was about to say, but stopped herself just in time. Not, however, before Edward's sharp ears—I have already said he was

at once careless and cunning in money matters—had caught the word.

“Given us what? More silk gowns, or books for the children, or garden-stuff for the house? These are his principal sort of gifts—mere rubbish! He never gives anything to me: never seems to consider the sacrifice I am making every day I stay on in stupid Ditchley. And yet he must know my value, or he never would have increased my salary as he has done to-day. It is just a conscience twinge, or because he knows he could not get anybody else to do my work for the money.”

“You know he could, Edward. He told me plainly that for half your salary he could get twenty curates to-morrow.”

“But not a curate like me?”

Mrs. Scanlan looked silently at her husband. Perhaps she was taking his measure; perhaps she had taken it long ago; and accepted the fact that, whatever he was, he was her husband—possessed of certain qualities which he could

no more help than he could the colour of his hair ; a rather lofty estimate of the individual called Edward Scanlan was one of them.

“Don’t you think, Edward, that instead of arguing about our blessings in this way, we had better accept them, and be thankful for them ? I am, I know.”

But no, the mean soul is never thankful. Into its capacious maw endless benefits from heaven and from man—that is, from heaven through man—may be poured, and still the cry is continually, “Give, give !” and the moment the gifts stop, the murmurs begin again.

Before Edward Scanlan had ended his first five minutes of rejoicing over his unexpectedly large cheque, he began to feel annoyed that it was not larger. It was not until his wife, watching him with those clear, righteous eyes of hers, made him feel a little ashamed of himself, that he vouchsafed to own she had “done pretty well” in her mission of the morning.

“A hard day’s work, too, it was, my dear ; a long walk and a good deal of talking. You

are a very good wife to me, and I owe you much."

Josephine smiled. Yes, it had been a hard day's work to her, and he did owe her much ; rather more than he knew. It is astonishing how often people apologise for errors never committed, and wrongs never perceived ; while the real errors, the most cruel wrongs, are not even guessed at by the parties concerned in the infliction of them.

While Mrs. Scanlan busied herself in preparing the tea, or in holding baby Catherine while Bridget laid the cloth—Bridget, who, of course, had quickly learned everything, and hovered about her mistress with eyes of rapturous congratulation and admiration,—it did occur to her that there must be something a little wrong somewhere ; that there was an incongruousness, almost amounting to the ludicrous, in the Rector's future heiress doing all these menial duties. But the idea amused more than perplexed her : and ere many hours had passed the whole thing seemed to grow so unreal, that

next morning when she woke up she almost imagined she had dreamt it all.

When, a few days after, Mr. Oldham paid his customary visit to Wren's Nest, she took an opportunity of expressing her gratitude for all his kindness, and slightly reverted to his last words over the garden-gate: but he stopped her at once.

"Never refer to that again. Perhaps I was a fool to tell you, but it's done now. Only mind, let all be as if I never had told you."

"I am sorry—if your reasons—"

"My reasons are, that few men like to be reminded of their own death; I don't. I shall keep to my bargain, Mrs. Scanlan; but if you ever name it again, to me or to any other creature, it is cancelled. Remember, a will can be burnt as easily as made."

"Certainly," replied Josephine, though with a sense of humiliation that was almost agony. Mingled with it came a sudden fear, the faint cold fear of the shipwrecked sailor who has seen a speck on the horizon which looks like a

sail, and may turn out to be no sail at all, or else drifts away from him—and then? Nevertheless, she had self-control enough to say calmly, “I quite understand you, Mr. Oldham, and I should wish you always to do exactly what you think right.”

“I believe that, madame, and I am accordingly doing it,” said the old man, with a return to his ordinary suave politeness, and calling one of the children in to the conference, so that it could not possibly be continued.

It never was either continued or revived. The Rector’s silence on the subject was so complete, that oftentimes during the long months and years which followed, Josephine could scarcely force herself to believe there was any truth in what he had told her, or that it was not entirely the product of her own vivid imagination.

But, at first, she accepted her good fortune with fulness of faith, and rejoiced in it unlimit-edly. It was such an innocent rejoicing, too; it harmed nobody: took away from nobody’s

blessings. The fortune must come to some one ; the good old man could not carry it away with him ; he would enjoy it to the full as long as he lived, and by the time death touched him, he would just drop off like the last leaf from the bough, perhaps not sorry to go, and gladdened in his final hour by the feeling that his death would benefit other lives, young and bright, ready to take up the ended hope, and carry it triumphantly on to future generations.

That desire of founding a family, of living again in her posterity, was, I think, peculiarly strong in Josephine Scanlan. The passionate instinct of motherhood—perhaps the deepest instinct women have—(and God knows they need to have it to help them along that thorny path which every mother has trod since mother Eve)—in her, did not end with her own children. She sometimes sat and dreamed of her future race, the new generations that should be born of her, impressed with her soul and body—for she rather admired her bodily self, it was so like her father,—dreamed of them as poets

dream of fame and conquerors of glory. She often looked at her César,—who, after the law by which nature so often reproduces the father in the daughter, and again in the daughter's son, was an almost startling likeness of the old Vicomte de Bougainville,—and thought, with a joy she could scarcely repress, of the old race revived, though the name was gone; of her boy inheriting fortune and position enough to maintain the dignity of that race before all the world.

And then César was such a good boy, simple-minded, dutiful; chivalric and honourable in all his feelings; so exactly after the old type of the De Bougainvilles, who had once fought for their country as bravely as at last for religion's sake they fled from it; sustaining through all reverses the true nobility, which found its outlet in the old Vicomte's favourite motto, "Noblesse oblige." Josephine watched the lad growing taller and handsomer, bolder and stronger, month by month and year by year, much as Sarah must have watched Isaac; see-

ing in him not only Isaac her son, but Isaac the child of promise, and the father of unborn millions.

I think Mrs. Scanlan must have been very happy about this time. Her worldly load was temporarily taken off her shoulders. She had enough and to spare. She could pay all her debts, and give her children many comforts that had long been lacking. She had not the sharp sense of angry pain which she used to experience, ever and anon, when, after waiting week after week till she could fairly afford Adrienne a new warm cloak, or César a pair of winter boots, their father would come in quite cheerily, and claim her admiration for a heap of musty volumes; valuable and expensive theological works which he had just purchased: not that he wanted to read them, he was no great reader at any time, but "they looked so well for a clergyman to have in his library." And when she remonstrated, he would argue how much better food for the mind was than clothes for the body; and how a good wife ought al-

ways to prefer her husband's tastes to her children's. And it was so easy to talk, and Edward Scanlan's arguments were so voluminous, that sometimes he half convinced his wife she was in the wrong; till, left alone, her honest conscience went back with a bound, like a half-strung bow, to the old conviction. She knew not how to say it, but somehow she felt it, and all the eloquence in the world could not convince her that black was white, or perhaps only grey,—very delicately and faintly grey.

But now, the sunshine of hope which had fallen across her path, or still more her future path, seemed to warm Josephine's nature through and through, and make her more lenient towards everyone, especially her husband. She felt drawn to him by a reviving tenderness, which he might have a little missed of late had he been a sensitive man: but he was not. His wrongs and unhappinesses were more of the material than spiritual kind—more for himself than for other people. He regretted extremely his children's shabby clothes, but it

never struck him to be anxious because their minds were growing up more ill-clad than their bodies. For they had little or no education ; and for society, scarcely any beyond Bridget's and their mother's. They might have had worse—at any rate.

Mr. Scanlan was exceedingly troubled about the present, because the luxuries of life were so terribly wanting at Wren's Nest : but he rarely perplexed himself about the future of his family. Whatever pleased him at the time, he did, and was satisfied with doing : he never looked ahead, not for a single day. "Take no thought for the morrow" was a favourite text of his whenever his wife expressed any anxiety. What on earth could she find to be anxious about ?—she was not the bread-winner of the family. It was he who had to bear all these burthens, and very sincerely he pitied himself ; so much so, that at times his wife pitied him too, believing him, not untruly, to be one of those characters whose worst faults are eliminated by adversity. For the fact that

"Satan now is wiser than of yore,
And tempts by making rich, not making poor,"

was not then credited by Josephine Scanlan. She still felt that the man of Uz was supreme in his afflictions; and often she read the Book of Job with a strange sort of sympathy. True, she did not understand half Job's trials—"her children were with her in the house;" her "candle" was still "in its place"—that bright light of contentment which illumined all the poverty of Wren's Nest. Health was there too: for the lightly-fed and hardly-worked enjoy oftentimes a wonderful immunity from sickness. But still it seemed to her that these blessings were not so very blessed, or lack of money neutralised them all, at least with regard to her husband.

His complainings, she fondly hoped, would be quieted by prosperity: when they had a larger house, and she could get the children out of his way in some distant nursery; when he had more servants to wait upon him, more luxuries to gratify him, and fewer opportunities of growing

discontented by the daily contrast between his neighbours' wealth and his own poverty. For, unfortunately, there was not many "poor" people in Ditchley—society being composed of the county families, the well-off townsfolk, and the working-classes. And Mr. Scanlan was always more prone to compare himself with those above him than those below him, wondering why Providence had not more equally balanced things, and why those stupid squires and contented shopkeepers should have so much money to do what they liked with, and he so little—he whose likings were of such a refined and superior order, that it seemed a sin and shame they should be denied gratification.

For, as he reasoned, and his wife tried to reason too, his pleasures were all so harmless. He was no drunkard—though he liked a glass of wine well enough; he seldom philandered with young ladies, except in the mildest clerical way; was never long absent from home; and, as for his extraordinary talent for getting rid of money, he got rid of it certainly in no wicked

way; but scattered it about more with the innocent recklessness of a child than the deliberate extravagance of a man. It was hard to stint him: still harder to blame him: much easier to blame "circumstances"—which made all the difference between a harmless amusement and a serious error. When he was a rich man he would be quite different.

At least so thought his wife, and tried to excuse him, and make the best of him, and believe in all his possible capacities for good; also in the actual good there was in him, which might have satisfied some people, who are content to accept as virtue the mere negation of vice, or to rule their affections by the safe law which I have heard enunciated by mediocre goodness concerning absolute badness: "Why should I dislike the man who has never harmed me?" But to a woman whose standard of right was distinct from any personal benefit received by her, or personal injury done to her; who loved for love's sake, and hated only where she despised; who had begun life with a high ideal,

and a passionate necessity for its realization in all her dear ones, especially the dearest and closest of all, her husband,—to such an one, what must this kind of married life have been?

Still, her heart grew tenderer over the father of her children. She saw him, and all he did—or rather all he left undone—in the fairest light. When he grumbled, she took it very patiently, more patiently than usual: thinking with satisfaction of her comfortable secret; how all these annoyances were only temporary; how he would by-and-by become a rich man, able to indulge himself as he chose. For in her heart she liked to see her husband happy—liked to give him any lawful pleasures; and minister even to his whims and vagaries, when this could be done conscientiously, without her having the pang of knowing that every selfish luxury of the father's was taking the very bread out of the mouths of the children. Not that he did this intentionally; but he did do it: because the even balance and necessity of things was a

matter Edward Scanlan could never be taught to understand.

Still, he was very good, on the whole, for some time after he received this addition to his income. It allowed him more pleasures; it lessened his wife's cares, and made her less obliged to contradict him. She grew softer in her manner to him—and Edward Scanlan was one who thought much about outside manner, without troubling himself to investigate what feelings lay beneath. In their mutual relief of mind, the husband and wife drew nearer together—dangerously so, for the preservation of Mr. Oldham's secret.

Righteous hypocrite as she fully believed she was, Mrs. Scanlan often felt herself to be a terrible hypocrite after all. Twenty times a day she longed to throw her arms round her husband's neck, and whisper that she had a secret—though one which did not injure him, quite the contrary! Whenever he was vexed about little things, she thirsted to tell him that his poverty days would not last for ever—that she

would by-and be a rich heiress, able to give him all he wanted, and rejoice in the giving. That keenest joy of wealth—to lavish it upon others—flashed out sometimes from the distant future, with a glow that lightened for her many a present gloom.

Still, things were hard now and then, and she had many a twinge of conscience as to how far she was doing right, and what her husband would think of her when he really knew all, as he necessarily must, some day. More than once she definitively resolved to go and speak to the Rector, whether he liked it or not; unburthen herself of all her doubts, and implore him to free her from her promise, and take away this load from her heart; a load heavier than he, as a bachelor, could comprehend. Little he knew how fatal to happiness is any concealment between married people, whose chief strength and surest consolation lies in being, for good and ill, absolutely and perfectly one.

With this intent Josephine had actually one day put on her bonnet, meaning to go to pay a visit

to the Rectory, ostensibly to excuse herself and the children from a tea-party there—a feast on the lawn—the year had again come round to the time of open-air delights—when her husband entered the room, and asked her where she was going.

Her answer was, of course, the truth, though not, alas ! the whole truth.

“Excuse yourself from the Rectory feast ? What a ridiculous thing ! To decline Mr. Oldham’s invitation, because the children had an engagement elsewhere—at a common farmhouse, too !”

Still, Josephine reasoned, it was a prior engagement ; and the people at the farm had been very kind to the children.

“But they are such unimportant people. Annoying them does not matter ; now annoying Mr. Oldham does. I never noticed the thing much till lately, when some neighbour or other put it into my head ; but Oldham does seem to have taken an extraordinary fancy for our children.”

“They are very good children,” said the mother, with a slight trembling of the voice.

“Oh! yes, of course. And pretty, too, some of them. Don’t be up in arms on their account, Mamma, as if I were always crying them down. I see their good points just as much as you do. And if the old fellow really has taken a liking to them, I’m sure I don’t object to your cultivating him as much as ever you like.”

“Cultivating him!—”

“I mean, with an eye to his leaving them something. He can’t live for ever; and when he dies, some small sum—even a hundred or two, would be a great help to us.”

Josephine stood dumb. Oh! if she had had the free, clear conscience of a year ago, how indignantly she would have repudiated such a motive! as she used to do all other similar motives of self-interest or expediency, which her husband occasionally suggested to her. For this lavish, frank-spoken, open-hearted young Celt had also the true Celtic characteristic of never being blind to his own interests.

Careless as he was, he knew quite well on which side his bread was buttered ; and under all his reckless generosity lay a stratum of meanness : which indeed is generally found a necessary adjunct to the aforesaid qualities.

He noticed his wife's silence ; at which his sensitive love of approbation—to call it by a lighter name than vanity—immediately took offence.

“ You think that was a wrong thing of me to say ? But you always do find fault with any new ideas of mine. You would like everything to originate with yourself ? ”

Josephine answered only the first half of his sentence.

“ I think it wrong to ‘ cultivate ’ anybody for the sake of what you can get out of him. And you know the proverb, ‘ It’s ill waiting for dead men’s shoes.’ ”

“ But how can one help it, when one has to go barefoot ? ”

“ Which is not exactly our case, Edward. We have as much as we require ; and we need

not be beholden to any man, thank God!"

"We are thankful for small mercies," said Edward Scanlan, bitterly, very bitterly for a clergyman. "But, putting aside the future, don't you think Mr. Oldham might do something for us at present, if he knew we wanted help? For instance, last Sunday, in the vestry, he was preaching to me a little extra sermon about César, noticing what a big boy he was growing, and asking me what I intended to do with him—when he was to go to school, and where? Rather impertinent interference, I thought."

"He meant it well," said Mrs. Scanlan, humbly, and with averted eyes: afraid of betraying in any way the comfort it was to find out that the Rector was not indifferent to a fact which had haunted herself for many cruel weeks—how her handsome, manly César was growing up in a state of rough ignorance, lamentable in any gentleman's son, and especially to be deplored in one who might have to fill a good position in society, where he would one

day bitterly feel every defect in education.

"Meant well? Oh, of course a rector is always supposed to mean well towards a curate, or the poor curate is obliged to take it so, as I shall. But my idea was this: that since he is so anxious that the lad should be well educated—which we cannot possibly afford—perhaps, if the matter were cleverly put before him, and you have such a clever way of doing things, dearest, Mr. Oldham might send César to school himself."

Josephine started.

"I do not quite understand you," she said.

No, sometimes she really did not understand her husband. She found herself making egregious mistakes concerning him and his motives. To put a most sad thing in a ludicrous light (as how often do we not do in this world?), her position was like that of the great cat trying to get through the little cat's hole: her large nature was perpetually at fault in calculating the smallness of his.

"Not understand! Why, Josephine, the

thing is as plain as a pikestaff. Don't you see how much we should save if Mr. Oldham could be induced to send César to school at his own expense? It is no uncommon thing. Many a rich man has done it for a poor man's son, who turned out a credit to him afterwards: as César might, and then the obligation would be rather on Mr. Oldham's side, in my having consented to the thing. Indeed," growing warmer as he argued, "it would be a very good thing on both sides. And I could then afford to pay that visit to London which Summerhayes is always bothering me about, and considers would be such an advantage to myself and the family."

Still Josephine was silent; but her face clouded over and hardened into the expression which her husband knew well enough, and was in his secret heart a little afraid of. He was thus far a good fellow—he respected and loved his good wife very sincerely.

"I see you don't like either of these notions of mine, my dear, especially about César. You know Mr. Oldham pretty well, even better than

I do. If you think he would take offence at such a hint——”

“I should never dream of hinting anything to Mr. Oldham. If I wanted to ask of him a kindness, I should ask it direct, and I believe he would grant it. But to beg from him indirectly the help which we do not really need——”

“We do need it. César must go to school. I want to go to London. And we can’t do both, you say.”

“No, we cannot. It is impossible. But it is equally impossible for us to accept favours, or beg for any, from Mr. Oldham.”

“So you say, but I entirely differ from you. It is no favour; the labourer is worthy of his hire.”

“And the beggar is worthy of both his kicks and his half-pence. But, Edward, I will take neither. You know my mind. Many a free, honest, honourable kindness may one man have to owe to another, and both be benefited thereby; but to ask from another anything that by

any amount of personal sacrifice one could do for oneself, is a meanness I have not been used to. My father never would stoop to it, nor shall my son."

Quietly as she said them, they were stinging words : such as she could use on occasions. She was not a stupid woman, nor a tame woman ; and in her youth the "soft answer," which is often woman's best strength, did not always come. She was fierce against wrong rather than patient with it—outraged and indignant where it might have been wiser to be quietly brave. Though not too thin-skinned, ordinarily, to-day her husband winced as if she had been whipping him with nettles. For he knew what an idol Josephine's father had been to her, and how well the noble old nobleman had deserved that worship. Poor Edward Scanlan was a little cowed even before the dim ghost of the dead Vicomte de Bougainville.

"Your father—your son. Then your husband may do anything he chooses ? You won't care. He, of course, is quite an inferior being."

"Edward, hush! The child!"

For Adrienne had put her tiny pale face in at the bedroom door, outside which she often hovered like an anxious spirit when her father and mother were talking.

"The child may hear it all," said Mr. Scanlan, glad to escape from a difficulty. "Look here, Adrienne, the difference between your mother and me is this: I want you to go to the Rectory to-morrow—she wishes to take you to the farm—which should you like best?"

The perplexed child looked from one parent to the other.

"I thought, papa, yon did not care for Mr. Oldham: you are always finding fault with him, or laughing at him."

"What a sharp child it is!" said Mr. Scanlan, extremely amused. "Never mind, Adrienne, whether I like Mr. Oldham or not; I wish you to go and see him whenever he asks you: and always be sure to pay him particular attention, for he may be very useful to both me and my family."

"Yes, papa," replied innocent Adrienne, though not without a shy glance at her mother for assent and approval.

The mother stepped forward, pale and firm, but with a fierce light glittering in her eyes :

"Yes, Adrienne, I too wish you to pay Mr. Oldham all proper attention, because he is a good man, who has heaped us all with kindnesses ; because, though we will never ask any more from him, we cannot show sufficient gratitude for those we have already received. Therefore, since papa particularly desires it, we will give up the farm and go the Rectory."

"Thank you, my dearest, you are very good," said Edward Scanlan, quite satisfied and mollified ; and on leaving the room he went over to his wife and kissed her. She received the kiss, but let him depart without a word.

Then, taking off her bonnet, Josephine put it by, mechanically rolling up the strings, a habit she had to make them last the longer—and did various other things about her drawers in an absent sort of way—never noticing the childish

eyes which followed her every motion. But always silently—Adrienne was such a very quiet child.

Not until the mother sat down on the bedside, and put her hands over her dry, hot eyes, with a heavy sigh, did she feel her little daughter creeping behind her, to clasp around her neck cool, soft arms.

“Maman, maman”—the French version of the word—with the slight French accentuation of the first syllable, such as her children generally used when they petted her.

Mrs. Scanlan turned round and laid her forehead on the little bosom—leaving a wet place where her eyes had lain, on the coarse blue pinafore.

She said nothing to Adrienne, of course ; and henceforth she carefully avoided naming to her husband the subject of César’s going to school. But she made up her mind when it should be done, and how, during those ten silent minutes in her bedroom. And from that day the idea of asking Mr. Oldham’s permission to tell her

husband of their future prospects altogether passed from her mind. No ; the Rector was right in his judgment : she herself was the only safe depositary of the secret. She locked it closer than ever in her heart, and returned to her old solitude of spirit ; the worst of all solitudes, that which does not appear outside.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.











